JOHN INGLESON

IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE

Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908-1926

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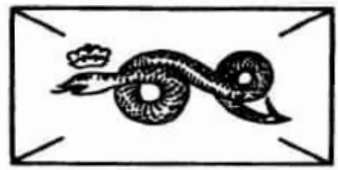

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IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE

Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908–1926

JOHN INGLESON

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Preface

THIS book was originally conceived as a one volume study of the labour movement in Java throughout the colonial period. As work progressed, however, it became clear that there was far more material available than first anticipated, enabling a closer study of the organization and development of worker militancy. Labour historians of Britain, the United States or European countries can often dispense with a great deal of descriptive material because they are able to refer the reader to an extensive existing literature. This is not the case for the labour historian of Indonesia, where there is little or no literature to draw on. A more detailed narrative is therefore necessary for a clearer understanding of the changes taking place in urban society. Moreover, it quickly became apparent that the growth of unionization in the late 1910s and early 1920s had to be viewed within the framework of the social and economic conditions of urban workers and the changes taking place in individual and collective perceptions of the world in these years. The first chapter is therefore devoted to a discussion of the urban workforce and to the changes taking place in its consciousness at the beginning of the twentieth century. Partly for reasons of size this study ends with the repression of the city-wide strikes in Semarang and Surabaya in late 1925. This repression does, however, mark an important break in the momentum of the unionization and mobilization of urban workers in Java. The destruction of the PKI at the end of 1926 put the seal on the first phase of the labour movement in Java. The social and economic grievances of urban workers remained, awaiting new leadership and new organizations. The ways in which urban workers expressed their grievances and the course of labour unions in the remainder of the colonial period will have to await a second volume.

I would like to thank a large number of institutions and individuals for assistance in the research and writing of this book. I received considerable assistance from librarians and archivists at the General State Archives in The Hague, the Royal Institute for Linguistics and Anthropology in Leiden, the National Library and the National Archives in Jakarta. In Indonesia I was supported by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and gained great assistance from Monoluande and Mastini Prakosa. The research was funded by the Australian Research Grants Scheme and the Special Research Grants of The University of New South Wales, to both of which institutions I am extremely grateful. My colleagues in the School of History at The University of New South Wales have created a marvellously stimulating environment in which to teach and write history and have opened my eyes to many new approaches and ideas. On a personal level I would like to thank the many people who have discussed my work with me over the past seven years, in particular Susan Abeyasekere, Ian Black, Robert Elson, Alan Jacobs, John Legge, Bill O'Malley, Anthony Reid, and Chris Shiel for commenting on draft chapters. I am indebted as always to the Tarekat family in Jakarta who have provided me with wonderful hospitality and friendship over more than a decade. The manuscript was typed many times by Sue Jones who patiently battled with my writing and with good humour brought me back to earth from time to time when I was too demanding. Finally, I wish to thank Anthony Reid as Chairman of the ASAA Southeast Asia Publications Series and Jennifer Brewster for their editorial skills and advice.

John Ingleson

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Abbreviations

THE Ministry of Colonies divided its archives into Secret or Not Secret, incoming or outgoing documents. An outgoing letter or telegram, or an internal report or minute, on a particular issue was filed together with relevant documents originating from either the Netherlands or the Indies government. These were referred to as *Verbaal*. The abbreviation V 29 April 1922 — G4, refers to a Secret *Verbaal* containing a letter or telegram from an official in the Ministry of Colonies, usually the Minister, to the Governor-General, or a minute by an official in the Ministry, dated 29 April 1922 and also containing relevant documents to the particular issues. If the *Verbaal* was Not Secret, it would be filed as V 29 April 1922 — 4.

Incoming letters from the Governor-General, or regular reports from government officials despatched through the Governor-General's Secretariat, were known as Mail Reports, either Secret or Not Secret, depending on the issue involved. All letters and reports relating to political matters were classified as Secret. The Mail Reports were numbered in yearly sequences as, for example, Secret Mail Report 1920/472.

BENISO	Bond van Eigenaren van in Nederlandsch-Indie gelegen Suikerondernemingen [Association of Owners of Netherlands-Indies Sugar Factories]
BOWNI	Burgerlijke Openbare Werkers in Nederlandsch Indie [Public Works Employees in the Netherlands Indies]
CSI	Central Sarekat Islam

ELS	Europeesch-Lagere Scholen [European Lower School]
f	guilder
HIS	Hollandsche-Inlandsche School [Dutch Native School]
IPO	Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisch-Chineesche Pers [Survey of the Native and Malay-Chinese Press], compiled by the Office for Public Reading and Associated Affairs in Batavia.
ISDV	Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging [Indies Social Democratic Association]
JSWB	Java Suikerwerkgevers Bond [Java Sugar Employers Association]
KPP	Kumpulan Pegawai Pegadaian [Pawnshop Workers Group]
KPPB	Kerukunan Pegawai Post Bumiputra [Native Postal Workers Union]
NIS	Nederlands-Indies Spoorweg [Netherlands Indies Railway]
NHM	Nederlands Handelsmaatschappij [Netherlands Trading Company]
OJS	Oost Java Stoomtram Maatschappij [East Java Steamtram Company]
PBOH	Perserikatan Beheerders en Onderbeheerders di Hindia [Association of Managers and Deputy Managers in the Indies]
PEB	Politiek Economische Bond
PFB	Personeel Fabrieksbond [Factory Workers Union]
PGHB	Persatuan Guru-Guru Hindia Belanda [Association of Teachers in the Netherlands Indies]
PKB	Perserikatan Kaum Buruh [Workers Association]
PKI	Perserikatan Kommunist di India [Indies Communist Party]
PPB	Perserikatan Pegawai Pegadaian [Association of Pawnshop Workers]
PPGD	Perserikatan Pegawai Geneeskundigen Dienst

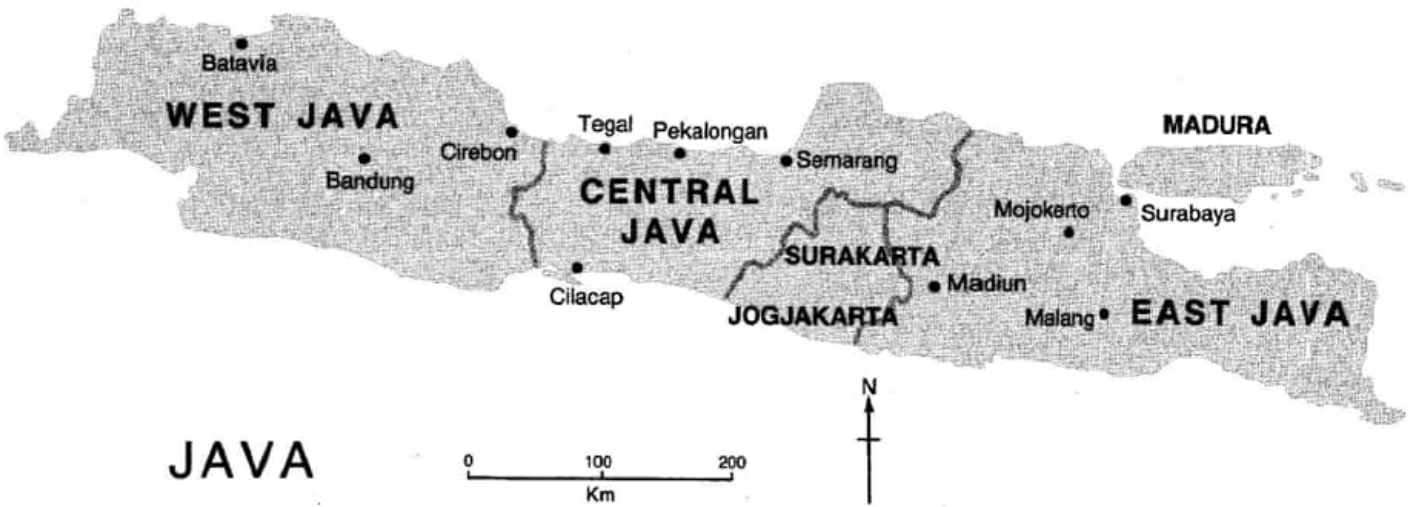
	[Association of Health Service Workers]
PPKB	Perserikatan Pergerakan Kaum Buruh [Association of Labour Unions].
PPPB	Perserikatan Pegawai Pegadaian Bumiputra [Native Pawnshop Workers Union]
PVH	Persatuan Vakbond Hindia [Union of Indies Trade Unions]
PZVB	Perhimpunan Zieken Verplegers Bumiputra [Native Hospital Nurses Association]
RVC	Revolutionnair Vakcentrale [Revolutionary Federation of Trade Unions]
SBB	Sarekat Buruh Bengkil [Workshop Workers Association]
SBE	Sarekat Buruh Electrische [Electrical Workers Association]
SBG	Sarekat Buruh Gula [Sugar Workers Union]
SBP	Sarekat Buruh Pabrikan [Factory Workers Union]
SBSI	Sarekat Buruh Singer Indonesia [Singer Indonesia Workers Association]
SBT	Sarekat Buruh Tjitak [Printing Workers Association]
SCSM [SCS]	Semarang-Ceribon Stoomtram Maatschappij [Semarang-Ceribon Steamtram Company]
SDAP	Sociale Democratische Arbeiders Partij [Social Democratic Workers Party]
SI	Sarekat Islam
SJS	Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij [Semarang-Joana Steamtram Company]
SPLI	Sarekat Pegawai Laut Indonesia [Association of Indonesian Seamen]
SPPL	Sarekat Pegawai Pelabuan dan Lautan [Seamen and Harbour Workers Union]
SPRSI	Sarekat Pegawai Rumah Sakit Indonesia [Indonesian Hospital Nurses Association]
SS	Staatsspoorweg [State Railways]
SS Bond	Staatsspoorbond [Government Railways Union]
VIPBOW	Vereeniging Inlandsch Personeel Burger-

	lijke Openbare Werken [Union of Native Public Works Employees]
VSTP	Vereeniging voor Spoor- en Tramweg Personeel in Nederlandsche-Indie [Union of Rail and Tramway Workers in the Netherlands Indies]
VVL	Verbond van Landsdienaren [Federation of Government Employees]

Glossary

batik	cloth with coloured motifs made by a waxing process
controleur	district officer
Inlandsche Bestuur	Native Administrative section of the colonial government
jimat	talisman
kampung	a neighbourhood in a town or city occupied by non-Europeans, often with its own administrative structure and mutual aid organizations and usually with its own guard system
kati	unit of weight equivalent to 625 grams
kiyayi	Islamic religious teacher
luruh	village head
mandur	foreman
mantri	local official below sub-district level
ontjom	a fermented food made from peanut oil cake
pasar	market
patih	deputy of the Regent
penghulu	Islamic religious leader
petak	a room in a house rented by a person or family
pondok	home divided into rented rooms
priyayi	Javanese aristocracy — used to encompass the class of high government officials

Regent	highest ranking Javanese official in the native arm of the colonial administration
sado	small, two-wheeled horse drawn carriage
slametan	feast
tukang	artisan
usiran	dismissal
Volkslectuur	department of the colonial goveinment which published books and pamphlets in indigenous languages.
Volksraad	the so-called People's Council established in 1918
warung	small road side stall
wayang	Javanese shadow theatre
wedana	sub-district head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WEST JAVA
Bandung
Cirebon
Tegal
Pekalongan
Semarang
CENTRAL JAVA
Cilacap
SURAKARTA
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JAVA

Introduction

INDONESIA is predominantly an agricultural society, with the majority of its people living on the land. Since the 1870s, however, an increasing proportion of Indonesians have lived in towns and cities, earning their living from the urban economy. This is particularly the case in Java, the most densely populated island in the Indonesian archipelago. Here, after the Dutch began to encourage private capital in 1870, there was rapid urban development. As the commercial, industrial and service sectors expanded, the cities demanded increasing numbers of workers — skilled as well as unskilled. The massive structural changes which rural Java had undergone since the imposition of the Cultivation System in 1830 were now followed by equally dramatic changes in the social and economic structures of the cities. This book examines the experiences and responses of the early generations of urbanized Indonesians.

The focus is on Indonesian workers in the modern sector of the urban economy in the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century and on workers in the sugar factories in Java who shared something of the proletarian experience of urban workers. The book begins with the struggles to create the first labour unions in the 1910s and ends with the colonial government's suppression of union activities after the Surabaya strikes in late 1925. It was a time of considerable militancy and political activity. The mental horizons of many urban workers — their thought worlds, their perceptions of society and their views of their place in it — were undergoing significant and lasting changes and increasing numbers of them were becoming conscious of their importance in the colonial economy. This developing self and group consciousness was reflected in urban workers' participation in voluntary

organizations, ranging from sporting clubs to improvement societies, as well as in political parties and labour unions. There was a remarkable fighting spirit among workers in the 1910s and 1920s. Despite the odds against them, many were determined to stand up to employers in order to demand better wages, improved conditions, or an end to humiliating treatment.

This book necessarily highlights the moments of crisis — the strikes and the lock-outs. Urban workers left no personal records, no speeches and few newspaper writings, and usually came into the public view only during disturbances and strikes, or as the subjects of government and private inquiries. Reliance on such information, of course, runs the risk of confusing the abnormal with the normal, of seeing worker militancy as far greater than it really was. Strikes must be seen in the wider context of the ordinary day-to-day life of urban workers. Nevertheless, the 'crisis' records provide significant insights into the life, work and changing consciousness of urban workers.

Much of the significant recent writing on workers and unions in Europe, the United States and Australia has been made possible by the availability of union records and very detailed police reports. Only fragments of these sources are available for late colonial Indonesia. The political intelligence service and local government officials maintained an extensive spy network which provided them with detailed information on labour unions and political parties. While there are problems in interpretation, access to this information would add immeasurably to our understanding of the urban workforce. Richard Cobb, the noted French historian, has shown how spy and informer reports can be used. in his work on French political protest in the nineteenth century.[1] Frequent police raids in colonial Java netted vast quantities of union and political party records which were presumably inventoried and deposited in official archives. When the twentieth century archives in Indonesia are more systematically accessible it will be possible to determine the extent of their survival and to make a closer analysis of the urban workforce.

With archives in Indonesia itself only partially available, this study has had to rely on archives of the former Ministry of Colonies in the Netherlands. When a major strike broke out, such as the railway strike in 1923, detailed material was sent back to the Netherlands. But such material was still necessarily a sifting of the vast quantity of informer reports and captured union archives,

concentrating on what colonial officials considered the more important issues. The archives of the Ministry of Colonies are complemented by the records of some of the major private companies and employer organizations in colonial Indonesia. The private railway companies, in particular, maintained extensive files on labour relations as did the major sugar interests. Again, the extant archives are from parent companies in the Netherlands, and even here much has been destroyed. Local records of individual sugar factories, railway companies, manufacturers and trading firms have probably been lost or destroyed during the Japanese occupation, the revolutionary years or the first decades of independence.

In the absence of extensive records from labour unions themselves and of regular spy reports, heavy reliance has to be placed on the Dutch and Malay language press in the colony, and particularly on the latter. Much of the historian's view of this early labour militancy and unionization is therefore filtered through the eyes of contemporary journalists. The Malay language press flourished in the 1910s and 1920s, attracting people of talent and sensitivity. Every major city in Java had at least one Malay language daily newspaper. One of the attractions of journalism was that it was one of the few professions in the colony that enabled young graduates from Dutch-language schools to earn a living independent of the government. Law and medicine held similar appeals. Through their education, young Indonesian journalists and editors had access to the intellectual milieu of contemporary Europe. Many were fluent not only in Dutch but also in English or French. At the same time they strove, intellectually and emotionally, to empathize with the ordinary people in their society. Despite the arbitrary restrictions of colonial press laws, they wrote with remarkable verve on a wide range of social, economic and political issues, having a sharp eye for detail and a clear sense of the political significance of what they were reporting.

Clearly, though, Indonesian reporters and editors interpreted events through Western-educated eyes, and possibly they downplayed what they regarded as the non-rational responses of strikers and union members. Given the use of local myths and legends by all nationalist parties, particularly Sarekat Islam and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and the frequency with which ordinary people's participation in political activity was associated with *jimat* (talismans), oath-taking, religious symbols and cults, similar

responses might be expected from those who joined labour unions. There are, however, very few such references in contemporary newspapers or in reports from government officials. Where such reports were made, they invariably concerned sugar factory workers in the hinterland of Java, rather than wage earners in the colonial cities.

The absence of these factors in the analysis of urban workers, unions and strikes by either Indonesian newspapers or colonial reports is surprising. Certainly, when reporting a nationalist political activity, local officials never hesitated to focus on them wherever possible. It leads one to the conclusion that they were unimportant, though it is possible that it reflects Dutch and Indonesian intellectuals' perceptions of the differences between urban and rural people. Both groups invariably saw rural activity by political parties or labour unions as inevitably making use of non-rational symbols because of the socio-cultural framework within which rural people understood the world. Urban movements, on the other hand, were, in their view, by definition modern rational movements.

In Indonesia the major promoters of labour unions in the 1910s and 1920s were the two largest nationalist parties, Sarekat Islam and the PKI. However, while there were strong structural links between labour unions and nationalist parties, most noticeably in their closely interlocking leaderships, this must not obscure the independent role of labour unions in promoting the social and economic interests of workers. Nationalist parties had a good deal less control over the unions they adopted or spawned than is usually assumed. For central leaders, and for some local leaders, involvement in labour unions was indeed part of their broader anti-colonial activities. But for many of those who provided leadership in the factories and workshops, on the trains and the docks, and for most ordinary members, the meaning and goals of unions in general and strikes in particular were quite limited. Individual strikes were almost invariably caused by social and economic grievances specific to a particular workplace or industry, albeit related to general economic conditions in the colony.

Labour unions were not merely appendages of the wider nationalist movement.On the contrary, worker mobilization and unionization were important parts of the making and development of nationalism in colonial Java. So many people were first radicalized by their perceptions of injustice in their workplace and

determined to do something about it. For many workers a position on the local executive of a labour union was their first experience in a modern organization, and many were later drawn into nationalist activities through their prior involvement in labour unions. All the major nationalist parties drew their core memberships predominantly from skilled workers, teachers and government employees in cities and towns throughout Java. Labour unions were important training grounds for middle level leaders of nationalist parties; the skills of organization, of speech making and of grass-roots recruitment were, for many, first learned in labour unions. In many ways labour unions were an even greater danger to the colonial state than nationalist political parties. They were an alternative, and potentially powerful, channel of grass-roots urban discontent and were effective recruiting agents for political parties. They were also the most important way in which intellectuals could gain an urban constituency. Little wonder that the colonial police and the political intelligence service kept as close an eye on labour unions as they did on political parties.

In recent years there has been a lively theoretical debate among historians of labour and industrialization in Europe and the United States. The debate is based on thousands of detailed monographs written over many decades, with many of the newer arguments emerging from micro-level studies of a particular community or workplace. The historian of Indonesia can envy the depth of writing and the extent of debate among a large body of scholars, but great care must be exercised before these theoretical insights are transposed to colonial Indonesia. While there are strong and important similarities in the processes of industrialization and commercialization in Indonesia and Europe, the social and cultural bases are very different. This is not to argue for purely empirical history, rather to say that methodological and theoretical insights must be firmly grounded in empirical research.

Some of the strongest debate concerns the importance of class analysis to understanding worker organization and militancy in nineteenth century Britain, Europe and the United States or in colonial Asia and Africa. Many Indonesian non-communist, as well as communist, political and union leaders made a class analysis of their society in the 1910s and 1920s. Barely an issue of either PKI or Sarekat Islam newspapers lacked at least one major article analysing colonial society in class terms. Even after the Sarekat Islam/PKI split in 1920 there was little discernible change in the

tone of major articles in the Sarekat Islam newspaper. Most labour union broadsheets also analysed urban workers in class terms. These were the voices of Western-educated leaders, influenced by Marxist or vaguely socialist ideas. The theme of working class solidarity — not just within Indonesia but world-wide — was also the subject of countless speeches by communist leaders.

There was little observable consciousness of class, however, among the tens of thousands of ordinary workers who joined unions. For them, the struggle was more basic and directed towards immediate improvements in their lot in life. Communist leaders struggled to arouse significant class consciousness in a society where vertical cleavages of ethnicity, kinship, patronage and religion were dominant. As well, economic differentiation in colonial Java was less advanced than in contemporaneous Western societies and the relationship between capital and labour less decisive in determining a person's social status. Where unions succeeded in drawing workers into their fold it was in large part because they were able to gain the support of patrons in the workplaces or of kampung leaders. Extensive circular migration was another major barrier to the development of class consciousness in the cities. Circular migrants made up a large group of urban workers — perhaps as many as 40 per cent of the adult Indonesian population in the cities. While there, they were affected to varying degrees by the socio-economic and political cultures they encountered, yet, as transient residents, their hearts as well as their families remained in the villages. Many worked in the informal sector of the urban economy whose members proved impossible to organize let alone educate to a consciousness of their class position.

Apart from the vertical divisions particular to Javanese society, the predominant consciousness of indigenous peoples in all colonies was that of race. The race division was all-pervasive and for intellectuals the prime target of criticism and frustration. In this sense Indonesia was no different from any other colony. But in one significant aspect it was different from China or India, both of which countries have an extensive literature on labour unions and worker protest. In both these countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were significant numbers of indigenous capitalists alongside European capitalists, so that workers organized as much against indigenous capitalists as against foreign ones, thereby more readily developing some measure of class conscious-

ness. In Indonesia there was no significant indigenous capitalist class. The modern sector of the economy was almost entirely in the hands of European managers in the service of European capital. The rest of the economy — apart from the batik industry in central Java — was predominantly controlled by Chinese, as were most of the small shops and commercial establishments with which ordinary urban workers came into daily contact. The Chinese were as alien to Indonesian workers as European managers and evoked similar antagonism based on race consciousness.

While major union leaders made effective use of the vertical divisions in their society and of the growing race consciousness in the urban workplaces, their stress on class struggle was not altogether in vain. Some skilled workers adopted class terminology during strikes, if only with a general sense of its meaning, and many who were drawn into branch leadership slowly developed class awareness. The British labour historian E. P. Thompson has argued that class and class consciousness are the last stages of an historical process, a process which begins with struggle. Through fighting and struggling for their rights and for improvements in their living standards, he has argued, workers become conscious of class.[2] Despite the importance of vertical divisions in colonial Indonesia and the strong consciousness of race, it was the work experience that was the most important factor in shaping the consciousness of increasing numbers of urban Indonesians in the 1910s and early 1920s. Urban workers' struggles to improve their economic lot and to redress their sense of injustice emerged from their work experience. The common work experience and the common struggle began to create a measure of solidarity which cut across other social divisions.

The central argument in a recent book by Barrington Moore, *Injustice:The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt,* is extremely useful for understanding the beginnings of collective action by workers in the cities of Java. Moore has argued that the key to popular action — whether protests and demonstrations or strikes and revolts — is a deeply felt sense of justice and injustice among ordinary people. Drawing on the work of E. P. Thompson and others, he has argued that when ordinary people's moral sense of justice is outraged by rulers, employers or others whose authority is normally accepted, then the legitimacy of that authority is brought into question, which in turn can lead to collective disobedience or revolt.[3] A similar argument has been extended

beyond the confines of Europe by an Indian historian, Dipesh Chakrabarty. Writing on Calcutta jute mill workers, Chakrabarty sees the motivating force for these workers' strikes in their deep moral sense of unfairness and injustice.[4]

Urban workers in Java in the 1910s and 1920s were not revolutionaries. They did not seek to overthrow the social, economic or political order; rather they sought to make the system work more fairly and more justly. E.P.Thompson has written of a 'moral economy' among workers in eighteenth century England, noting especially the importance of the price of bread to the most frequent form of mass protest, the bread riot.[5] Wage earners in colonial Java also had a sense of 'moral economy' — a belief in what was fair and just and proper.

Throughout this study workers in the cities of Java and in the inland sugar factories are constantly seen to go on strike over what they considered to be unjust and unfair treatment. The injustice might be an employer's refusal to pay better wages at a time when the workers were experiencing savage inflation or it might be what workers considered to be unfair treatment of a fellow worker by someone in authority. There was a strong sense of what was just and unjust and workers openly expressed these feelings at meetings or when questioned by officials or reporters.

Nevertheless, views of 'the just' and 'the unjust' are not historical constants. How different was Javanese workers' sense of justice and injustice in the 1910s and 1920s from the late nineteenth century? Here we are moving into uncharted territory because so little has been written on the urban history of Java. We do know, though, that for many decades before the formation of labour unions, workers had petitioned managers about their grievances, stayed away from work in silent protest or walked off the job in anger. At the beginning of the twentieth century some urban workers and workers in the sugar factories had had personal experience of a strike; others knew of friends or workmates who had withdrawn their labour. But strikes were unusual occurrences until the 1910s. The greatly increased militancy of workers reflects the accelerating process of urbanization and commercialization in the colony and the enormous social changes that accompanied it. There were significant changes taking place in the consciousness of increasing numbers of urban workers in the first two decades of the twentieth century which affected their sense of authority and legitimacy and sharpened their perception of what was just and

unjust. Treatment once accepted as normal from those in authority in the workplaces, because no one could see a way of successfully opposing it, became no longer acceptable without protest.

Strike statistics, official reports and newspaper accounts provide a broad outline of the increased militancy of urban workers and enable some understanding of the motivations of strike leaders — their hopes, their fears, their joy when successful and their disappointment when not. It is far more difficult to understand how ordinary workers perceived the social and economic changes going on around them. How did their views of the world change as a result of their involvement in and experience of the urban economy? What did a seaman, a railway worker or a pawnshop employee believe he was doing when he went on strike? It is difficult to get inside the minds of ordinary urban workers in any society. In colonial Indonesia the problem is compounded by the lack of diaries, correspondence or contemporary interview material. The questions, however, remain important and are at the centre of this study.

In the 1910s most European managers still saw labour relations largely in pre-modern terms. They brought with them from the Netherlands paternalistic and condescending attitudes to the working classes. These attitudes were reinforced not only by their belief in the superiority of European culture but also by their perceptions of Javanese society as still essentially feudal, with its people bound by traditional ties of bondage and dependence. While the lives of urban workers in Java in the 1910s and 1920s were much affected by dependency bonds to urban patrons, nevertheless they increasingly rejected the condescending attitudes of managers, talking instead of their rights and demanding an end to what they saw as unjust and unfair treatment. Involvement in labour unions and strikes changed their perceptions of colonial society, increased their political consciousness and developed organization and communication skills which were of immense value to nationalist parties. It was these people who were moved most strongly by the nationalist message of Sarekat Islam, the PKI and other political parties. They composed the bulk of the urban membership of nationalist parties. Most probably only vaguely understood the ideological framework in which outside political and labour union leaders described the relationship between capital and labour, but all understood well the social and economic realities of their lives.

It is here that the role of labour union and nationalist party leaders is crucial. Their propaganda, their newspaper writings and their speeches sharpened the sense of injustice which had for decades been simmering among urban workers and made them aware of new ways in which they could challenge employers. The strike weapon was a constant topic of discussion at union meetings, as was the need for workers to stand up to their European supervisors and employers. Through labour unions and nationalist parties, urban intellectuals helped shape the thought worlds of urban workers and tried to channel their grievances into organized campaigns against employers. The relationship between leaders and workers was often strained though, because of different perceptions of what leadership meant. Workers invariably believed that union leaders, and leaders of nationalist parties for that matter, had a duty fully to support them when they walked off the job. Not surprisingly, union leaders were more concerned with discipline and organization and generally strove to control workers' spontaneous strikes. The tension between union leaders and workers is a continuing theme throughout this study.

The nationalist polemics of Sarekat Islam and the PKI and the intensity of political and union activities heightened urban workers' sense of injustice and unfairness and developed in increasing numbers of them the confidence to try to do something to improve their lot in life. This was brought to a head by the sudden increase in inflation after the First World War, which coincided with an economic upsurge and a shortage of skilled labour. The skilled workers, in particular, quickly realized that, for once, the balance of power in the workplace had swung in their favour. These skilled, better educated and higher ranking workers agitated for better wages and conditions and organized semi-skilled and unskilled workers in support of their claims.

The agitation of the skilled and the literate struck a responsive chord in the workplace. Ordinary wage earners were affected by inflation even more than the skilled workers and shared their feelings of injustice at the indifference of management to their plight. Joining a labour union gave them a sense of security. For many, if a foreman or powerful kampung figure joined, then the safest course of action was to do likewise. For many others, though, it had a much deeper meaning. It was an expression of hope that life might become a little better. Attending union meetings, listening to workplace activists and taking part in strikes

was exhilarating. It gave workers a sense of community and common endeavour — perhaps also of power — at a time when urban kampung social structures were straining under the impact of the growing influx from the rural areas.

The initial strike experience of urban workers and workers in the sugar factories in the immediate post-war years was one of success. In the main they won their battles with management and government. This experience strengthened their belief that strike action was the way to obtain justice. Tens of thousands of workers flocked to labour unions in the expectation that unions would get them even greater victories.

Economic and political conditions changed after 1921. For the remainder of the colonial period there was a surplus of skilled labour, greater employer cooperation to defend their own interests, and a government determined to protect tranquillity and order. Strikes were now invariably defeated. This new experience — sharp, unpleasant and resulting in many sacked workers having to take lower paid work elsewhere — dampened worker enthusiasm for direct action and for involvement in labour unions. Labour unions flourished very suddenly. Just as suddenly they faded away when they were seen by workers as unable to protect them from the wrath of government and employers.

It was, then, a search for justice in the workplaces that drew tens of thousands of urban workers in Java in the 1910s and 1920s to labour unions. Union leaders held out the hope that lasting improvements in wages and conditions could be forced from employers. For nearly a decade they grappled with the problem of organizing workers in a colonial society where the proletariat was small, the pool of unskilled labour large and the government increasingly repressive. In the end they failed to create the strong institutional structures for which they strove. The 1910s and 1920s might be seen as years of failure — courageous and moving though the efforts of leaders and workers were. But improvements in wages and conditions were gained, and without the development of unions and the militancy of workers the post-war inflation would have taken even greater toll of workers' living conditions. Workers themselves probably saw this as success rather than failure. In the longer term, the labour movement contributed to workers' belief that they could have some say in their own lives. The experience of participating in labour unions and being involved in direct action did not die with the suppression of unions in 1925

and 1926. These years saw significant changes in worker consciousness and the beginning of a tradition of labour militancy which lived on in the collective memory as well as in the memories of individuals who took part.

This new, more highly developed sense of justice and injustice among urban workers and workers in the sugar factories, together with their experiences of the successes and failures of militancy, was of crucial importance for the development of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Denied open expression of their sense of injustice after 1926, urban workers turned to the nationalist parties where the grievances of all Indonesians, irrespective of social status, were transformed into anti-Dutch emotions. Membership of nationalist parties after 1927 was predominantly urban and composed largely of skilled tradesmen, school teachers and Western educated clerks or government employees. The tide of nationalism in urban Indonesia after 1927, seen most clearly in the crowds that flocked to hear the rousing oratory of the young Sukarno, disguised the undercurrent of discontent among urban workers and their conviction that their economic and social conditions were unjust. In the first decades of independence, after the repressive power of the colonial state and the Japanese was removed, urban workers rediscovered their militancy. Nationalism was no longer enough: the search for justice in the workplace was renewed. Some who were involved in the new wave of worker militancy after 1945 would have personally participated in the militancy of the 1910s and 1920s. Others would have only heard about it from fathers or friends. These years of worker militancy forged a vision of a more just society which, though stifled, permanently transformed the consciousness of many urban workers. When the struggle for justice in the workplace began again after 1945 it built upon these experiences.

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2. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968).
3. B. Moore Jr, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (London, 1978).
4. D. Chakrabarty, 'On Deifying and Defying Authority: Managers and Workers in the Jute Mills of Bengal circa 1890–1940', *Past and Present* 100 (1983), pp. 124-46.
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I
The Urban Workforce

POPULATION growth in Javanese towns in the nineteenth century was probably only a little faster than that in rural Java. Nevertheless, old towns such as Batavia in west Java, Yogyakarta, Surakarta and Semarang in central Java and Surabaya in east Java underwent considerable changes from the 1830s as Dutch colonial interests extended their control over land and people. The dramatic expansion in the amount of sugar-cane planted, harvested, crushed and finally carted to the coast for export saw a parallel growth of small harbour towns along the east Java coast and particularly of the port city of Surabaya. The growth of the sugar industry stimulated the development of new skills and categories of work in both urban and rural Java. New trades were in increasing demand as the number of Europeans in the towns increased, with an attendant growth in the service industries needed to make life in the tropics tolerable. The major towns not only became centres for European and Indonesian administrators but also slowly evolved as complex commercial centres servicing European interests and the growing demands of the Indonesian elite.

The pace of urbanization quickened from the 1870s, particularly in central and east Java where the land frontier was rapidly closing, landlessness increasing and many peasants forced to seek wage labour away from the land.[1] It was also aided by the expansion of export crops extracted from central and east Java after the opening up of Java to private capital in 1870, and by burgeoning government administrative and technical services trying to put the so-called Ethical Policy into practice in the early twentieth century. Ports, banks, trading companies all grew apace with the

expansion of the export of primary produce, as did the transport infrastructure necessary for carting crops to the ports for shipping to world markets. Growth was most marked in the three port cities of Surabaya, Semarang and Batavia and in the inland city of Bandung in west Java. Unlike many other colonies, Java was not dominated in the colonial period by one huge primate port city: urban growth was spread fairly evenly among Surabaya, Semarang, Batavia and Bandung.[2] All this contrasted with the relative stagnation of the old central Javanese cities of Surakarta and Yogyakarta whose geographic situation spared them from the changes that overwhelmed the port cities and Bandung.[3]

In 1905 only Batavia, Surabaya and Surakarta had populations in excess of 100,000. By 1930 Semarang, Yogyakarta and Bandung had joined them. Nevertheless the urban population, defined by the Bureau of Statistics in the colony as those living in towns of more than 5,000 people, was in 1930 still only 8.7 per cent of the population in Java. According to the 1930 Census, in addition to the six largest towns, there were also six towns with populations between 50,000 and 100,000 and another ninety-two with more than 5,000 but less than 50,000 inhabitants.[4]

The colonial cities in Java were ethnically diverse. All of the urban areas attracted people from surrounding regions, with the major coastal cities of Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya providing work for increasing numbers of people from outside Java. Surabaya, for example, had long had a large number of permanent residents and circular migrants from the nearby island of Madura, while the ethnic diversity of Batavia reflected that of the archipelago as a whole. The largest minority in the major cities was the Chinese — around 15 per cent in Batavia and 12 per cent in Semarang in 1920. Some were wealthy merchants or entrepreneurs but most worked in small businesses, as skilled artisans in workshops and factories or, to a lesser extent, as unskilled labour. The Chinese community was itself diverse, divided primarily into *totok* (those who were born in China) and *peranakan* (originally those of mixed ancestry but by the twentieth century meaning those born in Indonesia), and further divided by class and language.[5] The exclusivity of the diverse ethnic groups in the cities (Indonesian as well as Chinese), each living in separate quarters, often working in ethnically distinct groups and having little social contact outside their own group, was one more obstacle for labour unions to overcome when in the 1910s and 1920s they tried to organize the

urban workforce. When strikes occurred, employers and government often exploited the ethnic diversity of the urban workforce. Chinese workers were frequently used as strike breakers and were strongly condemned for this by Indonesian union leaders. They were not, though, the only people used in this way. When strikers were predominantly Javanese, replacement labour was recruited from other ethnic groups: when the Madurese harbour workers in Semarang went on strike in 1920, Buginese and Minahassans were recruited to replace them.[6]

The towns and cities in colonial Java were predominantly commercial and administrative centres. Industrialization was limited. In 1916, for example, there were 1,823 privately owned factories or workshops in Java employing a total of 49,000 workers. Despite expansion over the next twenty years, by 1942 there were still only 5,470 factories and workshops in Indonesia employing 350,000 workers, of which 70 per cent were in Java. There were an additional 50-60,000 employed in the railway industry.[7] With the exception of the railway and tramway industry and the large dockyard and ship-repair facilities at Surabaya, individual factories and workshops employed only small numbers of people. The official figures exclude those workshops and factories employing less than five workers, but even allowing for those employed in small repair shops, garages and service enterprises, the number remains small.

Contemporary photographs of Javanese cities in the 1910s and 1920s published in company and municipal reports or tourist guides invariably showed wide tree-lined streets, spacious modern buildings set in well-kept tropical gardens, clean well-ordered factories and neat modern housing estates for Indonesian workers. Pictures of new bridges, roads, electricity stations and other feats of Dutch engineering were proudly displayed alongside idyllic rural scenes of uncrowded villages surrounded by lush rice fields and stunning mountain ranges. Where Indonesians were portrayed at all, it was as smiling villagers or neatly uniformed drivers, conductors, tradesmen or factory workers. The overall impression was of orderly and peaceful development and a prosperous urban workforce enjoying the benefits of colonial rule.

The realities of life in the Javanese cities were far less blissful for the majority of inhabitants. Housing, sanitation and the general infrastructure were being severely strained. The faces of cities were changing under the impact of new technology. Steam trams

were giving way in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya to electric trams, and new lines were being pushed out from the city centres and commercial areas into new kampungs on the urban periphery. The first electric tramline in Batavia, for example, was opened on 20 April 1899.[8] The motor car was becoming by the 1910s the new symbol of status and wealth, competing with horse-drawn carriages and bicycles for space on increasingly congested roads. New buildings were being built to cater for the expanding commercial sector as well as the growing army of bureaucrats administering the Ethical Policy. The faces of the central city areas were being transformed by these developments, with new garden suburbs for the European community adding to the general air of affluence and progress.

The other side of the picture, one rarely acknowledged in official quarters, was the enormous overcrowding of the kampungs where the majority of Indonesian workers lived. The urban workforce in the 1910s and 1920s was far from homogenous. Pleasant kampungs where the better paid workers lived in relative comfort contrasted with squalid ones where casual labourers, street vendors and the like eked out an existence. There were by the 1910s well-established urban families of many generations' standing, with a distinct urban culture. There were also men who at first considered themselves as temporary migrants but who slowly adjusted to urban life, brought their families from their home villages and permanently settled in the kampungs. As well, there were increasing numbers who lived a marginal existence, driven to the cities by the deteriorating conditions in the countryside and tolerating urban life because they could see little other choice.

We know little about the extent of circular migration in colonial Java beyond the general acceptance by contemporary observers that it accounted for a significant and growing proportion of urban inhabitants.[9] Many migrants came for only a few months of the year, particularly in the months preceeding the annual harvest when food and cash resources in the rural areas were often at desperately low levels. They left their families behind, only returning on infrequent days off or to help with the harvest. Others sought work in the towns and cities in order to pay land taxes or settle debts with local traders and moneylenders.[10] Such people left their villages with the aim of living as cheaply as possible in the towns, taking whatever work they could find until they had what they had set out to earn. Money was either carefully saved until

the time came to return to the village or sometimes sent home at regular intervals through the Post Office. During and immediately after the harvest or during major festivals such as Lebaran, which celebrates the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, there was often a severe shortage of labour in the towns. For those who stayed in the towns there was then plenty of work and a premium on their usual wages. Increasing numbers of villagers who initially worked in the towns for only a few months of the year gradually became semi-permanent urban workers, eventually severing their direct relationship with their village, bringing their families to the towns and taking permanent work.[11]

Most villagers who came to the cities seeking work had access to kinship and friendship networks which linked villages to cities. It was through these networks that they obtained housing and jobs. Some were steered to a relative, a former villager or simply a well-known person who was a foreman at a factory, workshop or dockyard. Others joined friends or relatives from their village in the informal sector as fruit sellers, water carriers, street traders or the like. In this way, the flow to the cities was channelled along well-worn paths. Certain workplaces were predominantly the preserve of workers from one specific region and within larger enterprises specialized areas of work became the preserve of people from one region. Likewise, urban occupations in the informal sector were dominated by migrants from one region. It was much easier for immigrants to work and live with people who spoke the same language and whose cultural mores were understood. Ethnicity and kinship were the basis of kampung solidarity and helped recent migrants adjust to urban life. In a society where no welfare safety net was provided by the state, the only security for the urban majority were ethnic and kinship ties, mutual benefit associations and the sense of community in the kampungs where they lived.

In the colonial cities in Java the small but growing industrial and commercial sector engaged wage-labour and organized its workforce along modern lines of time and work discipline. Some of these enterprises were state-owned but most were under private foreign ownership and all were managed by Europeans. There were also a small number of 'indigenous' capitalist enterprises which operated in the large-scale sector of the economy. The bulk were Chinese-owned, but some were in Indonesian hands, most notably the batik industry in central Java. The cigarette industry,

much of the furniture-manufacturing, printing and wholesaling as well as many other consumer industries were Chinese-owned. They employed wage labour on much the same conditions as the foreign-owned companies.

Workers in the modern wage-labour sector of the colonial economy are the focus of this study. They include those employed by private capital, both foreign and local, as well as those employed in state enterprises or directly by the colonial administration. Within this group a clear distinction needs to be made between skilled and unskilled workers. The skilled workers — such as clerical and administrative personnel, teachers, foremen, mechanics, carpenters, bricklayers, compositors, engine drivers and train conductors — were only a minority of the urban wage-labour force. They were the better paid and had the most job security, often with permanency of employment: sometimes they were provided with company housing or a housing allowance and, if they worked for the government or government-owned instrumentalities, given a small pension on retirement. Most were long-time residents in the cities who had broken their direct connection with the land, and were less inclined to retain deferential attitudes to traditional authority. They were also predominantly male, though women were employed as nurses and typists as well as in some clerical and administrative jobs. It was these skilled, relatively secure workers who became the most politically active in the 1910s and 1920s and who formed the backbone of labour union branches.

The vast majority of urban wage-earners in the modern, large-scale sector of the urban economy were of a different kind, reflecting the relatively unsophisticated nature of the colonial economy where most jobs required strong muscles but only limited skills. A few had permanent jobs — perhaps employed on the railways as labourers, by Municipal Councils as street sweepers or by hospitals as cleaners. Most got work where and when they could, on low daily or hourly wages and with no expectation of more than a few days' work at a time. The majority of these unskilled wage-earners were men, but an increasing number of women were employed in the modern sector of the urban economy on a more or less regular basis, almost always on even lower wages than the men.

Most of the Indonesians and Chinese who lived in the colonial cities worked in the small-scale or informal sector of the urban

economy. A large number — men, women and children — worked as domestic servants for the European community or, to a lesser extent, for wealthier Indonesians or Chinese, where they were caught in deferential bonds of a new kind with no fixed wages or contract of employment. Some lived in basic accommodation at the back of employers' houses, others made the daily journey from the kampungs to work as cooks, washmen, cleaners or houseboys. Apart from domestic labour, many other urban Indonesians and Chinese worked in small, locally owned businesses, such as shops, bicycle and car repairers, furniture makers and tailors. Others worked in family businesses which depended almost entirely on the labour of family members or relatives, thus contributing to the total family income rather than working for a wage. The scope of work in the small-scale sector was almost endless, ranging from street vendor, *sado* driver and water-seller, to washman, shoe-shiner and prostitute. Many were self-employed, engaged in barely profitable peddling which nevertheless made an essential contribution to household income. *Warung* (street stalls selling food and drink) were but one of the enterprises in the kampungs that catered to the kampung communities themselves. Consumer goods from the large-scale sector and overseas found their way into the kampungs, but much of the kampung economy operated as a subsection of the larger urban economy. Workers in the small-scale enterprises which met the needs of kampung residents themselves were often recent migrants to the cities.

All but the most privileged Indonesian urban households needed more than one income in order to make ends meet. It was not unusual for the wife of a skilled tradesman to make and sell cakes or take in washing and for one or more of their children to find a few hours work each week in the markets, factories or workshops. Few were idle by choice, though many had less work than they wanted or needed because the urban economy simply could not provide enough jobs to satisfy the accelerating influx from the countryside.

RECRUITMENT OF LABOUR

THE construction of trunk roads in Java after the 1830s greatly increased rural mobility but the real breakthrough came with the expansion of the railway network from the 1880s. From then on it was possible for rural people to travel long distances in search of

work. The railway networks which fed into Surabaya, Semarang, Cirebon, Batavia and Yogyakarta created labour catchment areas for these towns.[12] Much of the unskilled, casual and seasonal labour in the docks, warehouses and factories, or which provided the street vendors and supplied the domestic labour market came from the hinterland of the towns and cities via the railway lines. The 1930 Census, which for the first time included a count of transitory workers, showed that more than half of the native inhabitants of Bandung, Batavia and Surabaya were born outside the city boundaries. Of these, the vast majority were born in the province in which the city was located.[13] However, a large proportion of the skilled and semi-skilled labour force seems to have been recruited from the kampungs of the towns themselves. A survey in 1926 of the metal industries in Surabaya, which employed a high proportion of skilled labour, showed that 84 per cent of the Indonesian workforce originated from Surabaya itself.[14] Not surprisingly, those villagers who moved to the towns and cities on a seasonal basis or as permanent migrants lacked the skills which would enable them to take any but the lowest paid labouring jobs.

The elite of the Indonesian workforce were those who held administrative or clerical jobs. Those who possessed the right lineage or family connections were able to obtain prestigious posts in the native arm of the Indies administration. Others, for whom this was impossible, sought clerical work with one of the state instrumentalities, preferably the Pawnshop Service but failing that the State Railways, or with one of the larger commercial companies. A prerequisite for such employment as clerk, cashier, stationmaster or assistant supervisor, was fluency in Dutch. In order to acquire this one had to be born into a family with some claim to *priyayi* status or have enough money or access to patronage to be able to afford the not inconsiderable fees of the Dutch language schools. This was a small exclusive group: in 1930 only 43,512, or 0.13 per cent of the native population in Java and Madura.[15]

The percentage of the workforce literate in Malay or a regional language was also not very large. The 1920 Census calculated that only 6.5 per cent of the native male population of Java and Madura could read and write and only 0.5 per cent of the native female population.[16] Apart from clerical and administrative tasks, many jobs in the Pawnshop Service, the Post Office, the Police Service and the printing industry demanded some degree of literacy and numeracy. Many other workers would have been able

to comprehend enough Dutch or Malay to carry out their daily tasks. But the majority of the urban skilled workforce and almost all of the unskilled workforce were illiterate. Of the 11,540 permanent workers surveyed in the Surabaya metal industries in 1926, over 75 per cent of whom were classed as skilled workers, only 716 (6.2 per cent) had had any kind of formal education, of whom 521 had attended a Native Lower School. Another 128 had attended either a European Lower School or a Dutch-Indonesian school and were therefore fluent in Dutch.[17] An investigation into the sugar factories in 1928, all of which were in small towns or rural areas, showed that out of 51,441 permanent Indonesian workers only 636 (1.24 per cent) had any formal education at all — and 70 per cent of these 636 were employed in administration or clerical work.[18] If the colonial administration and the education service are set aside, then the highest proportion of literate workers was in the pawnshop service, with the state and private railways having the largest percentage among industrial organizations. Station masters, station clerks, and even engine drivers and train conductors were for the most part able to read and write at least in Malay by the late 1910s.

The recruitment and training of skilled labour varied from industry to industry and from company to company. The earliest method was a kind of informal apprenticeship system whereby a skilled workman recruited assistants to do the dirty work or unskilled jobs and over a number of years sometimes taught them the skills of the trade. If an assistant eventually demonstrated his competence he might be accepted by the factory or workshop as an artisan (*tukang*) and paid as such. Some large companies continued to recruit skilled workers from the ranks of artisans' assistants throughout the colonial period. Increasingly, though, the larger employers, such as the state and private railways, the engineering companies and the naval establishment at Surabaya, recruited apprentices from the expanding school system and taught them their skills in company schools.[19]

Trade schools were established by the government as part of its general educational developments in the twentieth century, with three major centres opening in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya in 1909 and 1910. A fourth trade school was opened in Yogyakarta in 1919. The schools were open to boys between 13 and 17 years of age who had completed a Second Class Native School or equivalent education. The courses were three years in

length and the medium of instruction was Malay. There seems to have been no problem in finding jobs for the graduates: rather the problem was in recruiting enough boys in a society where few with some kind of education were willing to work with their hands.[20]

While some of the larger employers were moving in the 1910s to direct recruitment of skilled labour and towards formal apprenticeships and industry training of Indonesian recruits, most workers in the industrial, commercial and service sectors were recruited by Indonesian foremen. Foremen were among the better paid of the Indonesian workforce. In the factories and workshops they were generally trusted workers of long standing, usually former artisans.[21] In the sugar factories foremen were initially appointed from workers of some social standing in the villages from which the workforce was drawn.[22] Foremen in the sugar factories had established over time a kind of hereditary right to succession, as had foremen in the docks; but in the factories and workshops the managements seem to have carefully controlled their appointment. Whether appointed by Europeans or through ill-defined rights of succession, the intention of European managers was to try to incorporate into the industrial authority structure Indonesians with personal status or residual traditional authority.

The foremen themselves were usually born in the cities but retained links with the village of origin of their family. When seeking workers they invariably looked to their home village and region. Sometimes they personally visited their home region seeking out workers, but more often they seem to have established informal linkages, sometimes sustained at major holiday and festival times when they made brief visits. Foremen were therefore powerful men with considerable patronage at their disposal.[23]

Employers were happy to allow this recruitment system to operate because it supplied them with a reliable labour force under the personal control of a foreman. The foreman was the link between European management and Indonesian workers, with little direct communication between the two. Aside from the entrenched colonial ethos of white superiority, with its need to maintain a caste-like separation between rulers and ruled, the language barrier was a major problem. Few European managers spoke other than *pasar* (market) Malay and certainly not Javanese, Madurese or the other regional languages which were the mother tongues of their workers. As the modern sector of the economy expanded in the twentieth century, so the number of

young Dutchmen brought out to manage the system increased considerably. Old European hands frequently lamented that younger Europeans were less well prepared for work in the colony, more brash and less inclined to be bothered about understanding their native workforce.[24] The increased speed of communication between Europe and the Indies enabled more frequent home leave and generally kept Europeans in closer contact with affairs at home. The presence of European wives and families together with the closed worlds of European clubs all helped insulate European managers and supervisors from Indonesian society.

The foreman was the key worker in the European-owned companies. It was the foreman who was in contact with workers, not only passing on instructions from above but also hearing grievances first-hand and acting as a channel from workers to European managements. The foreman recruited his workers in the first place, extracting a commission for his services, and often arranged housing as well. The foreman decided promotions or dismissals and whether or not fines would be imposed for misdemeanours. It was the foreman who usually decided whether and when a worker could take a holiday or rest day, have paid sick leave or work overtime. The foreman maintained discipline, allocated jobs and generally controlled the lives of his workers.

The power of foremen derived primarily from their role in the workplace — they provided jobs, imposed penalties and allocated tasks — but was buttressed in many cases by their role as providers of housing, credit and even brothels. While they exploited ordinary workers in so many ways, they lived in and were part of the kampung communities and were constrained by their communal and social obligations. This was little understood by European managers who believed that foremen would always be on their side, given that they were well rewarded not only by relatively good wages but also by managers turning a blind eye to the commissions they imposed on their workers.[25] Managers were rudely shaken out of their complacency in the 1910s and 1920s when labour unions began recruiting foremen as branch leaders, thereby ensuring that those workers in a dependent relationship to them would also join. Foremen were moving from their old role as mediators between management and labour — presenting workers' grievances and generally trying to look after them within the confines of their special relationship — to a new role as leaders of their workers in confrontation with management.

Although it is difficult to find precise figures, contemporary observers frequently commented on the mobility of the urban workforce. The inquiry into the metal industry at Surabaya in 1926 concluded that in the engineering factories only 7.8 per cent of the Indonesian workforce had been employed by the same company for more than ten years, while 61.6 per cent had less than three years' employment. The figures for the automotive workshops in Surabaya were very similar, with only 7.4 per cent working with the same employer for more than ten years and 59 per cent for less than three years.[26] These figures are in part a consequence of the expansion of the metal industry in Surabaya after the First World War, but they also reflect the general shortage of skilled workers in the colony, at least through to 1930, and the competitiveness of the labour market for artisans. Skilled workers were frequently poached by one company's foremen from another company's employ, with the incentive being higher wages or bonuses. Printing companies also reported shortages of skilled labour during the periods of economic boom in the colony, from 1918 to 1921 and from 1925 to 1930, and competed vigorously not only to hold onto the artisans they had but also to attract workers from other companies.

The mobility of unskilled workers reflected the opposite phenomenon: such workers were in almost inexhaustible supply, therefore companies employed as few as possible on a permanent basis, recruiting what they needed on the cheaper day wage temporary basis. Unskilled workers were forced to search for work from company to company and industry to industry. They rarely moved from one large town to another, however, unless the towns were very proximate, because of the travel costs involved, their reluctance to move away from established migration flows and their awareness of the same uncertainty of employment wherever they went. When desperate, unable to find work anywhere in the town or city in which they lived, they drifted back to their village of origin where family and communal support structures saw them through difficult times. During the recession between 1922 and 1925, in the Depression years and during lengthy strikes, thousands of unskilled workers retraced their steps to their villages. Others, of course, soon took their place as the migration waves to the urban areas continued.

WORKING CONDITIONS

WORKING conditions for the non-rural workforce varied considerably from industry to industry and from employer to employer. There was legislation about safety conditions in the sugar factories as early as the 1830s, but until the Factory Act of 1905 there was little systematic attempt to control conditions in urban workplaces. The 1905 Act, which legislated minimum conditions in workshops and factories, and the establishment of an Office of Labour in 1921 charged with studying labour relations, reflected the growing importance of the industrial sector of the urban economy.[27] However, in general there was little government supervision of urban employers. The Department of Government Industries determined wages and conditions in all government enterprises, including the State Railways and the Pawnshop Service, but private companies established conditions as they saw fit. As a reaction to the establishment of Indonesian labour unions in the 1910s, employers began to form themselves into industry groupings. Apart from the Java Sugar Employers Association, these were organized on a city-wide basis. A Netherlands-Indies Employers Council was formed in 1922, but it was never more than a loose association of independent organizations. The primary aims of the employers' associations were to represent their industries to the government and to counter labour unions' organization of workers' demands for improved wages and conditions.

The urban wage-labour force can be broadly divided into permanent, temporary and casual employees. Permanent workers included almost all of the skilled labour, while most of the semi-skilled and apprentice labour were temporary workers and almost all of the unskilled workers were employed as casual day-wage labourers. In general, the lower the level of skill then the longer the hours of work, the greater the job insecurity and the more exploitative the working conditions. Permanent workers were generally paid on a monthly basis, given paid annual holidays, limited paid sick leave and were not only paid higher wages than the others but also were often eligible for pension payments, annual bonuses, diligence money and meal allowances. Temporary workers were paid on a daily basis, although often actually receiving their wages monthly, and were given fewer of the fringe benefits allowed to permanent workers. Casual day labourers were only paid for the days they actually worked.

The railway industry and the sugar factories were the largest employers of wage-labour in Java in the colonial period. There was no uniformity of conditions in the railway industry, with the State Railways generally providing better conditions than the private companies until around 1918, after which the situation was reversed, with the two larger networks among the private companies providing considerably better conditions than the small regional companies. In the Semarang-Cirebon Railway Company in 1922, for example, administrative personnel at the Head Office worked a 40 hour week, workshop administrative personnel worked a 43.5 hour week, while skilled and unskilled workers on the workshop floor worked a 45 hour week.[28] Most of the tradesmen were permanent employees but a high proportion of the unskilled workers were employed on a temporary basis.[29]

At the lower levels, according to a survey carried out by the railway union in 1914, those who worked on the stations, ranging from clerks and ticket sellers to shunters and sweepers, averaged an 11 to 15 hour day, while those who worked on the trains, as conductors, drivers or stokers, averaged 12 to 15 hours per day. During the sugar season, when processed sugar had to be moved from the inland factories to the major ports, railway workers were forced to work even longer hours. In the State Railways warehouses at Surabaya the normal working day began at 7 a.m. and continued until 5 p.m., with meals having to be eaten on the job. During the May-October sugar season it was not unusual for workers there to work until midnight or even later and then return to the job by 7 the next morning.[30] The long distances that many had to travel to and from work made the effective working day even longer and prevented most from going home during the one or two hour meal break in the middle of the day. A typical case was a State Railways station clerk who started out for work at 4:30 a.m. and did not return home until 6 or 8 p.m.[31] The Malay language organ of the railway workers' union in 1925 compared these working hours to those of a cow or buffalo:

> We don't know of a buffalo or a cow which works from six in the morning until eleven at night. Does anyone else know of a cow or a buffalo which works like that? We think there is no one who knows of such a situation.[32]

The provisions for rest days, holidays and wages for railway workers differed considerably from company to company and

according to whether workers were permanent, temporary or casual employees. Temporary workers who had worked for a company or the State Railways for three years and were deemed to be diligent and well behaved were usually given permanent status, which effectively meant a 10 per cent increase in salary and access to pension rights on retirement. All railway companies employed a considerable number of casual employees, particularly during the sugar season. These were unskilled or apprentice workers, such as brakesmen, pointsmen, cleaners, coal heavers, labourers, conductors, ticket sellers and clerks, all of whom were paid on a daily basis. The percentage in each category is difficult to establish, but the State Railways Annual Report in 1918 gave a figure of 4,025 day-wage workers out of a total Indonesian labour force of 24,316, or around 16 per cent.[33]

The report prepared by the railway union in 1914 was accepted by the railway companies as a thorough and accurate analysis of conditions at that time. On the matter of rest days it found that while permanent workers were generally entitled to one free day every seven to fourteen days, depending on the company, in practice sickness, absenteeism, a heavy sugar season or simply a shortage of labour often forced them to work longer periods without a break. The less skilled the worker the less frequent the rest days, with the extreme situation being that in the Netherlands Indies Railway Company (NIS) where station labourers in permanent employment were docked a day's pay if a rest day was taken.[34]

Casual day labourers could not afford the luxury of rest days. Letter columns in the railway union's journal encouraged the literate to voice their views and periodic surveys were made of the poorer, less skilled and illiterate members, which were often published together with revealing transcripts of interviews. One workman employed in casual service and paid on a daily basis, after complaining that he had few days off from work to spend with his family, added '. . . if I have a free day, I only resort to stealing'.[35] Another casually employed labourer indicated the reason for such nefarious activity: ' . . . for as long as I have worked with the [Company] I have never had a day off; if I did have a day off then I would have no money'.[36]

The provisions for annual holidays were considerably less generous for Indonesian and Chinese workers than for Europeans, who had a month's paid holiday each year together with financial

assistance for furloughs in the Netherlands. The State Railways and the private companies allowed Indonesian workers up to two weeks' paid holidays annually, but did not always grant applications for leave because of shortages of workers. If leave was not approved or not taken for any reason, only half could be carried over to the following year. All private companies subtracted from these fourteen days any days taken off sick during the year and all forbade leave during the busy sugar season between May and October each year. Again such provisions applied only to permanent and not to temporary or casual workers.

While conditions in the State Railways and the two larger private networks were far from idyllic, conditions were much worse in the small railway companies that operated one or two lines linking sugar factories to large towns or in the tramway companies that operated networks in the cities themselves. Most had few formal conditions of employment, relying on managers to pay whatever wages they could get away with. The Mojokerto Steam Tram Company in east Java was typical. It employed nine station masters together with one in reserve, all of whom were Indonesians. If everything went well, these station masters had one free day in every ten, with the reserve employee filling in on a rotational basis. But because of 'frequent sickness' the station masters complained that they often had to go months without a rest day, in all that time working a 13 to 14 hour day. Only six Indonesian clerks were employed for the nine stations, forcing them to go sick if they wanted a rest day. Conductors and engine drivers were in the same position as station masters, with only one reserve for each category, forcing them to go long periods without rest days save on account of sickness. In this small company there were also no regulations on promotion, dismissal or holidays, leaving individual workers at the mercy of the European managers.[37]

In the sugar industry labour was classified into five categories: administrative workers (about 5 per cent), chemical workers (laboratory workers — about 1.5 per cent), technical personnel (the artisans and labourers who worked in the crushing and cooking processes at the heart of the sugar factories — about 48 per cent), cultivation and transport workers (about 30 per cent) and miscellaneous (about 16 per cent).[38] All of the administrative and chemical personnel were permanent employees, as were most foremen and skilled workers in the sugar factories themselves. The rest, just over two-thirds of the total workforce employed at the height of

the 1928 sugar season,[39] were casual labourers drawn from villages in the vicinity of the factories. During the four to five month season both permanent and casual workers worked a 12 hour day, with permanent workers working a 10 hour day for the rest of the year. In some factories labour contracts between workers and management were verbal ones, but in most they were written, being read out to workers before each placed his fingerprint on them. It is clear from the strike wave between 1919 and 1921 that most casual workers and many permanent ones had little idea of the contents of these contracts, with management making only minimal effort to explain their provisions.

After a series of lengthy strikes which shut down the metal industries in Surabaya in late 1925 and early 1926, the Indies government ordered the Office of Labour to investigate. As well as analysing the immediate causes of the strikes it produced a detailed report on conditions in the industry. Twenty-nine factories were surveyed, altogether employing 11,521 Indonesians, of whom 8,881 were classed as skilled workers. In addition to these permanent workers, between 700 and 1,500 casual day labourers were drawn from the kampungs of Surabaya as the need arose.[40]

Despite the conservative disposition of the investigators, it was still the opinion of the Inquiry that the labour contracts in the metal industry left a lot to be desired. It stated that '. . . it is difficult to find a looser contract than the ones here'.[41] Most workers were paid on a weekly basis and therefore entitled to one week's notice of dismissal or one week's pay in lieu of notice, with only the clerks, draughtsmen and a few other administrative personnel paid on a monthly basis. The average working day was 8-10 hours, but all companies required much longer hours of work during the busy periods, in particular in the months leading up to the sugar season when old equipment needed urgent repair and new machinery had to be completed in a hurry. The Dry Dock Company was known to require its workforce to work 24 hours without a break if urgent ship repairs had to be carried out. Overtime was paid, but in most companies not for the first 2 hours or so of extra work. The seasonal nature of much of the engineering and repair work, dependent as it was very largely on the sugar factories, meant that often in the months leading up to the beginning of the sugar season in May of each year a lot of overtime was worked but during the season itself and in the months afterwards many workers were stood down for lack of work.

For almost all workers in the modern sector of the urban economy, then, the working day was a long one with little attention paid by employers to industrial safety, light, ventilation or the provision of basic facilities such as running water for washing. Not surprisingly the absentee rate was high: most workers were paid on Saturdays (either weekly or monthly) and Monday was a particularly bad day for absenteeism — 'Blue Monday' it was often referred to by employers. Workers probably saw an absence from work while they still had a little money in their pockets as one way of getting a much-needed rest. Sickness also affected workers badly, with an absentee rate as high as 30 per cent reported during the wet season when repeated flooding of kampungs brought influenza and more serious water-borne diseases. The heavy nature of labourers' work must also have taken its toll. Some of the larger companies had a doctor in their employ with a basic company clinic giving free treatment for minor ailments. The majority of workers, however, were forced to cope with illness as best they could, often feeling more comfortable with traditional medical advice rather than Western medicine, even if provided free by their employer. Most, though, had no access to free clinics and for them Western medicine was far too expensive.

Women and children were an increasingly pliable source of cheap labour for the modern sector of the Indies economy. In 1914 a government inquiry reported that in recent years the cultivation industry and the factories had increased their employment of women and children, largely because they were cheaper to employ than men. It also found that women were increasingly seeking wage-labour because of deteriorating household incomes and because of the decreasing amount of work available in the cottage industries of spinning, weaving and batik making. Some women and children who entered the wage-labour force did light work in the factories or on the plantations, where they worked on planting, weeding and watering. For this latter work children were paid between 6 and 12 cents per day and women between 15 and 20 cents per day.[42] Increasingly, though, women did work every bit as heavy as that done by men. In Semarang in 1912, for example, women and children could be seen doing the heaviest labouring work in the building industry.[43] Despite their abysmally low wages, the income earned by women and children through casual or seasonal work was an important part of the household budgets of the poorer families in both towns and villages.

In the sugar factories around 17 per cent of the total workforce was women, a percentage that varied little over the last four decades of colonial rule. An inquiry by the Java Sugar Employers Association in 1925-26 revealed, however, that a much higher 45.7 per cent of labour days in the factories were worked by women and children.[44] This indicates that women and children worked long hours during the milling season: certainly longer hours than the male workers. It was estimated that 80 per cent of the female workforce was employed in the centrifuge section of the factories, a vital part of the sugar process where women's supposed qualities of close attention to detail and continued vigilance were considered by the Dutch to make them better at this task than men. A better explanation may be that given by the Sugar Syndicate in 1919: women were employed to do work in the sugar factories that men simply refused to do.[45] Much of this labour was employed at night during the milling season when the factories were in continuous operation. Women also performed this task in sugar factories in the Netherlands, but whereas in the Netherlands they were among the best paid workers in the industry, in the Indies they were among the worst paid temporary workers. A study of employment in the sugar industry in 1934 argued that the female workforce in the sugar factories came from the lowest social groups in the surrounding villages,[46] presumably because although the work was hot and tedious and the wages particularly bad the women's families were desperate for any additional income, no matter how small.

Women were a major part of the workforce in the batik and cigarette industries, both of which were decentralized into small factories in a large number of towns throughout central and east Java.[47] Conditions were reminiscent of sweat shops in early industrial Europe; hours of work were long and wages were very low, even for a generally low wage society. In urban factories conditions were no better. As well as factory work, a considerable amount of female (and probably child) labour was engaged in lowly paid piece-work in the clothing industry. This out-work system suited employers because it saved on capital outlay and enabled them to adjust their employment of cheap labour to the seasonal demand for clothing.

As women gained greater access to education, increasing numbers were employed as teachers and nurses, though men remained the majority of both groups. By the 1920s almost all the

nursing staff at hospitals in Java were Indonesian, though the supervising sisters and, of course, most of the doctors were Europeans. The Semarang Municipal Central Hospital was typical of the major hospitals in the cities. Most of the male nurses lived in the city kampungs but the female nurses lived in boarding houses operated by the hospitals and while there were subject to hospital discipline.[48] Teaching and nursing were two of the areas of female employment which were partially unionized in the early 1920s, though always under male leadership.

Large numbers of women also worked as cooks, washmaids, cleaners and child minders for both European and wealthy Indonesian families in the towns and cities. The 1920 Census estimated that the domestic labour segment of the economically active population could be as high as 25 per cent, a large proportion of which would have been women. Many other women not permanently employed for a cash wage carried water, sold cakes, snacks or drinks, or worked on and off in local markets in order to add to the meagre household income.

The sight of poverty-stricken women walking the streets of Javanese cities was frequently commented on by the Indonesian press. In 1919 one reporter told readers that in the streets and kampungs of Solo, in central Java, one often met women carrying small, thin children in their shawls begging from house to house. Even children could be seen begging. The endemic poverty, he argued, had been made worse by the vicious cost-of-living increases in recent years.[49] In 1921 another journalist reported that so much land in the Yogyakarta region was under contract to the sugar factories that farmers could no longer adequately look after the needs of their wives and children. This resulted in a large number of poor women seeking work in the city and environs of Yogyakarta: 'They are cloth traders, and outside the town they even work as labourers, hauling water, dragging sand and stones, etc, all of which they do not because they like it but from poverty'.[50]

Children were employed in a whole range of jobs. Many worked alongside their parents in shops, *warung*, small businesses or in the batik industry. Others would have assisted parents who worked as washers, cleaners, street vendors and the like. Children also sold newspapers, carried bags at markets, polished shoes on railway stations, washed cars and generally helped in many industries for a few cents an hour. Every morning at the major railway

stations children as young as 8 years old could be seen scurrying along the platforms armed with cloths and seeking to polish travellers' shoes.[51] There is some indication that the extent of child labour in the cities was increasing in the twentieth century, though the evidence is inferential rather than statistical. Certainly the labour unions and the Indonesian political parties thought the problem serious enough to warrant their concern. One of the problems was that industries could not recruit enough workers for some jobs which were particularly badly paid and therefore turned to children to fill the gap. One of the large private railway companies, for example, paid a mere 4 cent per hour for assistant brakesmen in 1919 and similar rates for pointsmen: wages which were deplorably low even by contemporary standards.[52]

The Labour Office belatedly took some measures to control child and female labour in 1924, primarily as a result of international obligations extending to the colonial possessions of European countries. At the urging of the Labour Office, the Java Sugar Employers Association banned the employment of children below 12 years of age in sugar factories from the beginning of the 1924 season.[53] It strongly opposed, however, a proposed ban on night work by women. As the chairman of the Java Sugar Employers Association privately argued in 1924:

> The practical objections against the above-mentioned measures are overwhelming for our industry. A ban on the employment of children below a certain age presents few difficulties; they are usually easily replaced by older children. The replacement of women by men is not so much expensive as very difficult to achieve, perhaps impossible; in areas where the amount of labour available to factories is small, one must have recourse to female labour.[54]

Motivated by at least appearing to live up to their international obligations, in April 1925 the government introduced new regulations on child and female labour. There were three important clauses. Firstly, a total ban on children below the age of 12 working at night. Secondly, a ban on daytime child labour in factories and closed workshops where more than ten people were employed, in loading or unloading or carrying goods in factories and warehouses and in the railway and tramway industries. Finally, female labour at night was banned except for specified industries. The powerful sugar interests again exerted their

influence on the colonial government by immediately obtaining exemption for women to be employed in the sugar factories during the milling season provided detailed records were supplied to the Labour Office.[55] The effectiveness of the new regulations was further eroded not only by the fact that they only applied to workshops employing more than ten people but also because of the impossibility of policing the regulations in a society where under-employment and unemployment was rife and where uncaring employers could always obtain whatever labour they wanted on their own terms.

WAGES

WAGES paid to Indonesian workers were at the discretion of individual employers and reflected the supply and demand for labour in an industry, skill or region of Java. The gap between the wages paid to Europeans and Indonesians, even when doing the same work, was enormous and the difference between wages paid to skilled and unskilled workers was also very large. Skilled workers were generally in short supply, particularly immediately after the end of the First World War, whereas unskilled labour could easily be recruited from the pool of under-employed in the kampungs or from villages within striking distance of the towns. Wage rates reflected this. They also varied considerably from company to company in the same industry and from town to town. This was a frequent source of friction, leading on a number of occasions to strikes.

It is difficult to be precise about the level of wages in the modern sector of the economy because of these considerable variations and because of the inadequacy of contemporary statistics. In general, wages in most industries were stagnant through the early years of the twentieth century to 1917 or 1918, rose significantly between then and 1921, only to be reduced again from around the middle of 1922. There was a small but steady improvement in wages in most industries from 1926 until the impact of the depression in 1930 once again sharply reduced them. The following table for one category of urban workers is probably a good indication of the relative movement in urban wages generally.

More important is the relation of wages to prices. Here again it is difficult to find precise figures. It is clear, though, that between 1913 and 1920 the cost of most articles at least doubled, including

Average daily wages for unskilled labour employed in the public works department (in cents)

	1913	*1920*	*1921*	*1922*	*1923*	*1924*
Batavia	50	75	90	80	60	60
Semarang	45	65	75	65	55	55
Surabaya	50	70	75	75	70	65
Bandung	30	70	70	60	60	50

Source: *Centraal Kantoor voor de Statistich, Jaaroverzicht van Nederlands-Indie 1929* (Weltevreden, 1930), p. 222.

basic foods such as rice. Prices rose steadily during the First World War but there was a sudden and dramatic surge between 1918 and 1920.[56] The militancy of workers and unions after 1918 seems at best to have brought wages for some roughly into line with inflation. Skilled workers fared considerably better than the unskilled. In most cases, though, wage rises were very late compensation for the inroads of inflation. All independent and government inquiries in the 1910s and early 1920s were unanimous that those dependent on a wage income were increasingly finding it difficult to secure the basics of food and shelter.

The government was sufficiently concerned at the sudden increase in prices after the war, and the obvious failure of wages to keep pace, which resulted in massive labour unrest, that in 1919 a Commission was established to investigate the possibility of introducing a minimum wage in the non-agricultural sector of Java. The Commission reported in 1920 that despite the incompleteness and unreliability of available statistics it was convinced that 'the level of wages now paid to an uneducated worker are, in general, too low for a hygenically satisfactory minimum existence'.[57] It argued that there was considerable evidence of low wages for the lowest paid workers leading to under-nourishment, and advocated government intervention to establish a minimum wage on a district by district basis according to the local costs of basic commodities. The minority report of the Commission concluded that in 1920 the Javanese worker who possessed no land (almost half of the Javanese population at that time) would have been under-nourished if his household income was under f1.40 to f1.75 per day. Most skilled workers, it concluded, were lucky to earn more than half this amount.[58]

The government's response was to accept the findings of the Commission and in 1921 to pressure companies to pay higher wages.[59] However, it rejected the recommendation for the introduction of legal minimum wages. It argued, probably correctly, that it would be impossible to police minimum wages in an economy such as Java and that there would be no cooperation from either employers or employees.[60] A widely expressed view among European employers and bureaucrats was that any increase in Indonesian wages would simply lead them to work less. The Declining Welfare Report in 1912 had noted how widespread this view was among employers, who asserted that Indonesian workers had few needs, certainly fewer than Chinese workers who were generally paid higher rates for exactly the same job.[61] Similar objections were raised in 1920 to any attempt to impose a minimum wage: the Javanese, it was argued, worked to obtain a predetermined sum of money and the only result of raising wages would be for them to turn up to work less frequently.[62] Many would have agreed with the argument of an early Governor-General, J. van den Bosch, who in 1833 asserted that: 'There is nothing more pleasing to the Javanese than to be in a position where they will have to work less. This is the result of climatic conditions'.[63]

Employers' perceptions were chronically self-interested, though not entirely inaccurate. However, Indonesian attitudes to work in the modern sector of the economy had less to do with laziness than they surmised. Studies on workers in industrial England in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries have shown how their values differed from those of employers. Leisure, festivals and communal activities were as important, if not more so, than alien work in the factories, which was endured only in order to make enough money to live on. 'Saint Monday' was an informal holiday for large numbers of English workers, much to the chagrin of employers who, like Europeans in twentieth century Java, argued that the only way to get undisciplined workers to work each and every day of the week was to pay them less.[64] It took English workers, argues E.P. Thompson, two or three generations to adjust to the alien time and work discipline of the factories.[65] There is no reason to believe that Javanese workers adjusted any more quickly; indeed the new patterns of living may have been even more alien. The high level of absenteeism in the modern sector of the Indonesian economy, chronic on Mondays after pay day, and the difficulty of getting workers to come to work for a full

six days each week were problems shared by employers in Java and England.

At least the English climate was temperate. In the hot and humid coastal cities of Java much of the work was enervating and unpleasant. For most workers, who had to toil in the heat and humidity under the discipline of the clock and rules they barely understood, turning up for work at a factory, workshop or wharf was an unpleasant necessity. Living on a day-to-day basis, affected by endemic disease as well as periodic illnesses, it is little wonder that when they had some money in their pockets they took a day or two off. When in August 1921, for example, piece-work rates in the Surabaya harbour suddenly soared in the wake of a huge increase in labour demand brought about by an increased number of ships in port, employers complained bitterly that their labour problems only worsened. Harbour workers now only worked half a week for the same amount of money they normally received for a full week's work and refused to work any more.[66] Many employers tried to reduce absenteeism by paying a bonus of up to 20 per cent of total wages to Indonesians who turned up to work for the full six day working week. It was a strategy that had only limited success, indicating that those in regular work had a set of values very different from those of their employers.

Some companies provided a basic midday meal for their workers or a small meal allowance. After the explosion in the price of rice in 1919 many companies also began to supply subsidized rice to their workers. Some of the larger companies, especially the railways, operated cooperatives where basic foods, clothing and household items were sold a few cents cheaper than in local stores. However, as the cooperatives usually operated on a cash basis or on very limited credit most workers had little choice but to continue to run up debts with local, mainly Chinese, shopkeepers.

Many companies also paid wages in advance at certain times of the year, usually New Year and Lebaran, so that Indonesian workers could afford the extra food and clothing needed for these festivals. The amount advanced was deducted from wages over the rest of the year. No doubt some employers believed that they were showing concern for their workers by such a system, but others would also have been well aware that keeping workers always in debt to them helped keep them compliant. Union leaders in the 1910s and 1920s often argued that if workers were paid decent wages they would not be so dependent on wage advances for

Lebaran and the New Year but would have savings on which they could draw.[67]

Most companies also paid their employees an annual bonus. The amount paid depended on the rank of the worker as well as the profitability of the company in the preceeding year. Workers often anticipated annual bonuses by borrowing from moneylenders in the weeks preceding the month when bonuses were usually paid, or by running up debts with local stores. Store owners were happy to permit this to the limit of the anticipated bonus. If the bonus was paid later, as it sometimes was, or was lower than anticipated, workers became considerably agitated. Spontaneous strikes frequently occurred when two or three days after the usual date for payment of a bonus there was still no sign of the extra money. Such strikes were almost always settled quickly by the immediate payment of the due bonus or by a clear promise as to when it would be paid. Workers came to depend on wage advances and bonuses but employers invariably saw them as privileges which could be withheld at their whim.

Until the unionization of workers, overtime payments were at the discretion of individual employers, even though workers in the sugar factories and industries serving the sugar industry were forced to work even longer hours than usual just before and during the sugar milling season. Few sugar factories paid any overtime at all, despite the long hours during the milling season, clearly believing that annual bonuses were sufficient compensation. One of the first issues taken up by all trade unions was the need for a regulation giving workers clearly defined overtime payments as a matter of right.

Studies of workers in Third World cities have stressed the importance of examining the household and not the individual as the basic unit of economic enterprise.[68] Indeed, employers and government in colonial Java sometimes justified low wages in the modern sector of the economy by arguing that they were only part of the total income of kampung households. It was usual for individual members of a kampung household to work in different sectors of the urban economy. One might work in a factory or workshop, another in the small-scale or informal sector, while the children did odd jobs inside the kampung itself or in the wider city economy. Entire households often were engaged in the small-scale informal sector, but where one member was employed in the large-scale sector it was far more likely to be the man. The

exception was the sugar factories, where, as we have seen, women supplied the majority of the labour-days during the milling season.

Any analysis of household incomes in the late colonial cities in Java is further complicated by the fact that for many circular migrants the household unit was in the village and not the city. Whether they worked in the large-scale or the small-scale sector, they endured poor wages and miserable living conditions because the money they earned made all the difference to the total income of their families in their villages. The presence of a large reservoir of unskilled workers whose households were located outside the cities had the effect of further depressing urban wages.

In 1926 the Office of Labour made a detailed study of the budgets of 606 families in Surabaya kampungs. In all cases the men were permanent employees of metal industries in that city and therefore better off than most urban workers.[69] It used as a guideline a Bureau of Statistics estimate that for Indonesian native families earning less than f100 a month, 55 per cent of their income should be spent on food and 7.5 per cent on clothing if their minimum needs were to be met. The men in all 606 families earned under f100 a month, some considerably so, though income earned by wives and elder children would have boosted household incomes a little. Of the 606, only forty-eight owned their own house (but paid rent for the lease of the land on which the house was built), the remainder rented either one or more rooms, or a house from the company for which they worked or, more probably, from a private landlord. More than 50 per cent spent less on food and clothing than the basic requirements as calculated by the Bureau of Statistics. Generally, the lower the worker's income the higher the percentage of his wage spent on rent, taxes, water, light and transport and the lower the percentage available for food and clothing.

Most urban Indonesians were perpetually in debt. When they were not behind in rent payments for their house or land they owed money to moneylenders or to local shopkeepers and stallholders. A detailed survey of workers employed by the Batavia Town Council in 1937 concluded that workers' households lived on credit, with an average of 63 per cent of wages going to landlords and shopkeepers in payment of debts.[70] It was not unusual for workers to be paid on a Saturday and have nothing left on a Sunday because their wages had been used to pay off debts. Moneylenders often waited outside a factory on pay-day in order

to collect repayment of money they had advanced a few days earlier. The going rate in Surabaya in 1926 was for a worker who earned f2.40 a day to borrow four days' wages in advance at the discounted rate of f8.[71] The government pawnshops, established to try to provide cheap credit for Indonesians and to free them from the grip of predominantly Chinese moneylenders, were a good indicator of the constant state of indebtedness in which most urban Indonesians lived. On the day following pay-day most transactions at pawnshops were from people removing items from pawn, whereas a few days later most transactions were from people bringing domestic items back to pawn for a little extra to tide them over until the next pay-day.[72] Small domestic items, such as pots, pans, pairs of shoes, baskets and plates, spent most of their time being shuttled back and forth to the pawnshops.

The constant state of indebtedness of workers, particularly the semi-skilled and unskilled, made them especially vulnerable during strikes or lock-outs. Employers were well aware that this was a useful weapon in their efforts to force strikers back to work. They often found that if they let it be known that all strikers would be dismissed if they did not return to work by a stipulated date, this increased the pressure placed on strikers by local shopkeepers.

A detailed breakdown of how employees in the sugar factories owned by the Amsterdam Trading Company spent their bonuses after the 1921 milling season illustrates the condition of general indebtedness.[73] Individual sugar factory managers determined their annual bonuses according to the profit of their factory for the past year, but in general most paid between one and two months' wages to their workers. Some paid it in a lump sum at the end of the milling season, usually just before the New Year. Reports from the Amsterdam Trading Company factory managers in February 1921 detailed the areas in which the recently paid bonuses had been spent. Most managers reported that workers spent a large proportion of their bonuses repaying debts and regaining goods from pawnshops — the lower paid the worker the greater the percentage spent on debt repayment. Debts had also been incurred with traders and local shopkeepers in the months leading up to the New Year in anticipation of bonuses being paid. After these debts were cleared, what was left was usually spent on new clothing for the whole family, new furniture or house repairs. Luxury items, such as bicycles, were in greater demand at this time of the year. The skilled workers who received the largest bonuses

also used part to buy land or a house, sometimes for an investment. Finally, there were many *slametan* (feasts) held in factory kampungs immediately after the payment of bonuses, and children's marriages or circumcisions were often arranged for this time of year.

Wages were reduced by a number of deductions, both official and unofficial. Where workers' wages were paid through a foreman — the usual practice — it was not uncommon for the foreman to deduct up to 20 per cent as his commission for providing the jobs in the first place. Foremen sometimes also acted as moneylenders, charging high short-term interest rates and deducting repayments from weekly or monthly wages. Other sums were deducted for advances made by the employer, for taxes, house-rent and, most significantly, for fines incurred by the worker. An extensive fine system was considered essential by most companies as the only way of imposing social control and industrial discipline on Indonesians who had so shortly left the less regimented village world. In 1922, for example, if a postman was late to work by as little as five minutes he was fined f1.50; for late delivery of a telegram the fine was f1.[74] For postmen and telegram deliverers this was about half of their daily wages. The extent of the fines, usually arbitrarily imposed by foremen or European supervisors, caused the railway union in 1914 to lament that 'The fine has become as epidemic for us as malaria. . .'[75]

HOUSING

WITH the rapid growth in the twentieth century of the major cities of Surabaya, Semarang, Batavia and Bandung, the provision of adequate housing for Indonesians, together with basic facilities such as clean water, drainage, sewerage and garbage disposal, roads and electricity, became problems increasingly beyond the capacity of European governments to solve. The European-dominated Municipal Councils were largely oblivious to the emerging problems except as they affected European suburbs. The Indies government in Batavia was too intent on balancing budgets to spare much effort, let alone money, for urban development in the interests of the poor. As the urban middle class grew in numbers — Europeans, Eurasians, some Chinese and a few Indonesians — the kampungs in which most Indonesians subsisted both contracted in area and increased in density. In Bandung, for example,

between 1910 and 1937 the total kampung area decreased by 25 per cent but the number of people living there increased from around 45,000 to around 160,000.[76]

Anyone familiar with contemporary Third World cities would not be surprised at living conditions in the towns and cities of Java in the last decades of colonial rule. The Europeans, both rich and not so rich, lived in large bungalows in the high side of town, with fences to enclose their gardens and protect their property from the natives. The bungalows were set amidst well-kept, tree-lined streets complete with footpaths and gas, later electric, lighting. On the low, often swampy, side of town (the northern marshy coastal areas of Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya), lived the mass of Indonesian skilled and unskilled workers. If they were lucky they lived in brick houses owned by the company for which they worked. The vast majority, though, lived in bamboo houses more or less identical to those in the villages they had left behind, with narrow dirt roads, which were dust bowls in the dry season and morasses in the wet season, primitive sanitation, communal wells and no electricity. The Chinese lived in separate kampungs and the Eurasians generally lived on the fringes of the European areas, aspiring to European status and increasingly resentful of the growing number of educated and skilled Indonesian workers who threatened their delicately balanced position in the colony.

The kampungs were beset with water-borne diseases, particularly cholera, and in the wet season many simply became putrid lakes because they were situated on low-lying land with no drainage. Sanitation facilities consisted of a hole in the ground, and water provision was often another hole in the ground, usually only a few feet away from the first one. Water was supplied to hydrants in the kampungs — in Surabaya from as early as 1903 — but had to be bought from water-sellers, who after 1920 in Surabaya were officially appointed, supplied at a fixed price and forced to sell also at a fixed price.[77] There were never enough hydrants, particularly as the kampungs became more and more crowded, and for many residents the price of water from water-sellers was too high. In such cases they had to resort to canals, rivers and private wells even though often polluted.

Disease was endemic in the kampungs, particularly malaria, dysentery, tuberculosis and hookworm, which was reflected in the high level of absenteeism due to sickness and the physical weakness of many workers. The death rate from disease was also high

— especially the infant mortality rate — and, of course, life expectancy was low. Cholera epidemics and outbreaks of plague periodically struck the kampungs. Houses were for the most part built of bamboo with a thatched roof of palm leaves and with dirt floors. Though fine in rural areas, where there was plenty of light and space between them, in urban areas they were built cheek by jowl in narrow streets. Rats nested in the roofs or between the bamboo walls and triggered off the plague. Whole kampungs were frequently razed as anti-plague measures, but the long-term solution was found in structural changes in the houses to prevent rats from nesting there, including the use of tiled roofs and, later, concrete floors.[78]

The larger employers of Indonesian labour owned kampungs in which they built a small number of houses for rent. The railway companies, both state and private, were probably the largest providers of company-owned housing, but the sugar factories and some of the larger companies in Surabaya, Semarang and Batavia also provided some housing. This housing was generally of three classes, differentiated by size rather than by construction material, for most company-owned housing was constructed of brick with a tile roof. Most companies, however, provided no housing at all for their Indonesian employees and those that did catered only for the small minority of skilled permanent employees.

Not that company-provided houses were always good quality. There were constant complaints from railway workers about inadequate maintenance, poor facilities or the bad location of the kampungs themselves. Such complaints were high on the list of grievances taken up by their union with employers. In 1916 the State Railways kampung in Cirebon was criticized for having only one well for about fifty people, no toilets in individual houses and small one-room houses of only 9 square metres.[79] Workers in a State Railways kampung in Batavia complained in 1916 about the unhealthiness of their kampung with conditions so bad, so it was claimed, that workers tried to avoid being transferred to Batavia.[80] The kampung was on the northern side of the city, with the lack of drainage causing constant malaria sickness. In March 1918 floods in Semarang were so bad that water was over 2 feet deep in the railway workers' kampung.[81] An official report in 1926 quoted from a description of a Surabaya kampung given by an Indonesian official which graphically portrays the squalor in which many urban Indonesians lived:

Conspicuously situated between the houses were low-lying hollows in which lay extremely bad-smelling green fungus and which were either almost full or overflowing with human excrement, and alongside the footpaths lay numerous dead rats (the kampung suffered from the plague) and in the middle of such a dunghill a large water well was situated in such a way — perhaps fortunately — that people could no longer reach it. There are *petak* inhabited by factory labourers, domestic servants and policemen where the door is so low that I must get down on my knees in order to get inside. I think this is done in order to keep the roof low and thereby minimize the building costs.[82]

Not all company-owned kampungs were so bad. The East Java Steamtram Company in 1925 had a new kampung for some of its workers on the outskirts of Surabaya, complete with a football field and a community hall with a small library and a paid gymnastics instructor each week. Nevertheless, the railway union was less than impressed, pointing out that the kampung was so far out of Surabaya that whenever there was a football match between the new kampung and others in the city, the East Java Steamtram Company put on special trams and made money out of transporting players and spectators so far. The Company was accused of providing even this football field 'in order that workers might forget their destiny which is so bad. . .'.[83] Likewise the gymnasium was only intended to try to keep poverty-stricken workers in good enough physical condition that they could continue working hard and increase the Company's profits. Finally, although the library was welcome, it had not escaped the author's notice that all the books in it came from the government-run *Volkslectuur* in order to try to keep the literate occupied so that they did not read about radical nationalist ideas.[84]

The vast majority of urban workers were forced to fend for themselves, renting houses or rooms as best they could. It is difficult to be precise about the proportion of kampung dwellers who owned their own houses and the land on which they stood, or who owned their houses on rented land, because it varied from city to city and over time. A survey of Javanese housing in Semarang in 1914 found that at least 80.4 per cent of Javanese houses in the kampungs were owned by the occupiers, but that only 29.2 per cent of these people owned the land on which the house was built. The rest paid land rent.[85] Not surprisingly, in wealthier kampungs, where better-paid skilled workers lived, the percentage of house owners was considerably higher than in poorer kampungs where

the unskilled, often casual, labourers lived. The former were also more favourably situated with regard to flooding and town facilities. Usually, the rental agreement between the land owner and the lessee was a verbal one, with cases reported of owners lifting land rent as soon as house improvements were made by the house-owner, or threatening house-owners with eviction if rent was overdue but then agreeing to purchase the house in lieu of the overdue rent at a price well below market value. In 1914 it was estimated that the Javanese who rented a house paid about 26 per cent of his income in rent and that 75 per cent of those who rented land on which they owned their own house paid less than fl a month.[86]

An investigation into the living conditions of workers in the Surabaya harbour in 1927 revealed the appalling conditions in which these people lived.[87] Many were circular migrants, spending only a few months of the year in Surabaya before returning to their families in their villages. Most of the workers were housed in dwellings owned by their foremen, in a poverty-stricken kampung close to the harbour. One slum dwelling which housed twenty-three workers was described as 3 metres broad, 8 metres long and 1.7 metres high. Built of bamboo with a dirt floor and owned by a foreman on the harbour, it was surrounded by similar houses and right behind a house where a week earlier the plague had been found. In another house owned by a foreman, harbour workers paid 3 cents per night to sleep one above another with 120 sleeping places crammed into the house. Such was the shortage of even this sort of accommodation that the kampung was always packed, and many workers unable to find a bed were forced to sleep on the floor of the local markets.

As well as harbour workers' kampungs there were other kampungs where most of the inhabitants worked in the one industry or with the one employer. Just as workers tended to be recruited by foremen from their own regions, so they also sought communal support by living in the one kampung, often in dwellings, rooms or beds rented from the same foreman who provided them with their jobs. All this not only increased the relative wealth of the foremen but also increased workers' dependency on them.

For many workers not only were kampung conditions expensive and unhygenic, but the kampungs themselves were situated far from their place of work. This was a particular problem for the poorer workers, for as the urban middle class (both Indonesian

and European) expanded, inner city kampungs were taken over for more expensive housing and their inhabitants forced out into the fringes of the city. It was not unusual for workers to spend between one and two hours each day getting to and from work. In 1926 the Office of Labour calculated that about 75 per cent of the workforce in the Surabaya metal industries lived such distances from their work.[88] Many workers walked long distances to and from work each day, others patronized the trams and trains. Cases were reported of workers who earned between 65 cents and f1.30 a day having to pay as much as 50 cents for daily transport to and from work. Many who travelled long distances from outside the town where they worked did so on the first day of the week only, staying with friends in the town, or sleeping wherever they could, until the last day of the week when they returned home. It was claimed that the high rate of absenteeism in industry was not only caused by sickness but also by workers simply not being able to afford the cost of fares to and from work towards the end of the week.[89]

Government regulations in 1854 had guaranteed the autonomy of the kampungs, leaving them to carry out their own policing and social control as well as being responsible for their own public works.[90] The system worked as long as the kampungs were semi-rural appendages to the towns and cities and lightly populated with a high percentage of long-standing residents. As the major towns and cities expanded, kampungs lost their semi-rural character and became increasingly crowded areas, fully integrated into the economic life of the towns but with up to half their residents born elsewhere. Social control and community functions once performed under the leadership of an elected *luruh* (kampung or village head) now began to break down. The autonomous policing of the kampungs was replaced by regular patrols by the Town Police, and many previously accepted kampung duties, such as being rostered for guard duty at night, were increasingly avoided by the new generations of urban workers. Public works, such as sanitation, drainage and garbage disposal, were also neglected: they were barely needed in the lightly populated semi-rural kampungs of the nineteenth century but were essential to the higher density kampungs of later years.

The old structures were unable to cope, yet the Municipal Councils established in the early years of the twentieth century were reluctant to accept responsibility. Indeed, the creation of

representative institutions in Java did little for the Indonesian majority in the cities. Municipal Councils were established in Batavia in 1905 and in Surabaya, Semarang and Bandung in 1906 with a minority of Indonesian members, either nominated or elected on a very restricted franchise. The Councils were primarily concerned with protecting the interests of European residents. With a few notable exceptions, such as D.J.A. Westeveld, a secondary schoolteacher and leading member of the Social Democratic Association, and H.F. Tillema, a pharmacist, both of whom were members of the Semarang Town Council in the 1910s and 1920s, few councillors were more than superficially concerned with the needs of ordinary people in the kampungs.

The colony's laws were amended in 1918 to allow for the abolition of the autonomy of kampungs lying wholly within the boundaries of each Residency. On application by a Municipal Council they could be absorbed into the city administration. Few were absorbed. The Indies government was sufficiently concerned to begin kampung improvement schemes from around 1920 in the major cities and in 1925 to establish native housing corporations to build simple kampung houses. However, little was achieved: the government looked primarily to local Councils to provide funds and Councils were not prepared to do anything that increased the tax burden on Europeans. The onset of the Depression slowed the kampung improvement scheme even further.[91] It was constantly outpaced by the flood of new migrants, and most of those who did benefit were the better-off Indonesians who moved into the 'improved' kampungs where roads, drainage and street lights had been installed.

WORK, LEISURE AND PLEASURE

DESPITE their often miserable social and economic conditions, urban Indonesians sought to live life to the full. Major festivals, such as Lebaran, Muhammad's birthday and New Year, were celebrated and enjoyed. The end of the Ramadan fasting month saw many urban dwellers retrace their steps to their villages of origin in order to celebrate Lebaran with family and friends. Sometimes labour union and political leaders urged urban workers to live within their means and celebrate less expensively, but for many it was their one chance each year to buy new clothes and to

eat delicacies the likes of which they were unlikely to taste again until the next Lebaran.

The most regular form of relaxation in the 1910s and 1920s, as it had been for many decades, was the cheap food and drink of local *warung*, where gossip as well as politics were enjoyed with friends. For the boys and younger men a game of football was common — either aimlessly kicking a ball around an open space or participating in one of the many teams that regularly played in urban competitions. If you could not play then you could always watch, and many men regularly found a tram fare in order to watch a game played by their local side. Kite flying, gambling or simply talking with friends whiled away many an hour. The cinema was increasingly popular, with large cinema houses catering for up to 3,000 people in all of the major towns and cities. Probably only the better paid urban workers could afford to attend in the 1910s and 1920s, with the urban poor restricted to older and cheaper forms of entertainment such as the *wayang*. Cinema houses became useful venues for nationalist rallies and union protest meetings. Alcohol — largely in the form of *arak* (rice wine) — and opium enabled some to escape from the realities of life for a while, with harbour workers and sailors earning a reputation for excessive alcohol consumption.[92] Others attended the multitude of literacy and improvement courses which mushroomed in the kampungs after the advent of Sarekat Islam.

Prostitution also flourished in Javanese cities in the last decades of colonial rule — not surprisingly, given the poverty and exploitation of women generally and the large number of unattached male circular migrants and men who had left their families behind in the villages. The major port cities, particularly Surabaya, had been notorious throughout the nineteenth century for their extensive prostitution. Brothels were for the most part small-scale affairs, located in well-known kampungs in the cities.[93] Most prostitutes seem to have been village women who worked in the nearby town or city for a few months only, or perhaps for a few months each year over a longer period of time. Like male circular migrants, they got work in brothels through networks of kinship and friends. It is likely that the owners of the brothels recruited women from particular areas on a regular basis, in much the same way as foremen on the docks or in the factories recruited unskilled labour. Indeed, an investigation of harbour workers' conditions in Surabaya in 1927 indicates that the foremen not only recruited

their male labourers from the countryside and provided cheap accommodation, but also in some cases owned the local brothel as well, thereby making even more in commissions from their workers.[94]

Life in the towns and cities of Java in the last decades of colonial rule was difficult for most people. Whether it was harder than life in the countryside, however, is unclear. For many of the poorer people who migrated to the urban areas even the lowest paid jobs were an improvement on what they had left behind. At least the cities gave them a chance to earn a cash income, however small, and perhaps also a chance to save something to send or take back to their villages. It is, however, by no means clear that the urban migrants exclusively originated from the poorer strata of village society or from the poorer villages. Some may have been the more entrepreneurial or the more adventurous, seeing in the towns and cities an opportunity to improve their standard of life not because they were desperately poor but because they aspired to better things. Others may have been attracted by the urban lifestyle or by the presence there of friends and relatives. Urban migrants' perceptions of their new life, their behaviour at work and their responses to political parties and labour unions would have been affected by their previous experience of life in the villages.

WORKER CONSCIOUSNESS

THE cities were melting pots in which old ideas, attitudes and relationships were dissolved and from which new social and cultural forms emerged. For those whose families had been urban dwellers for decades, even centuries, the cities were the only world they knew and even in hard times they had no villages to which they could return for support. For the hundreds of thousands who flocked to the urban areas from the late nineteenth century onwards, whether as circular migrants or as permanent residents, life in the cities was full of new experiences. Before seeking work in the cities some would have worked as tenant farmers or sharecroppers on land too small to support their families, but most would have been landless labourers. The nature of the urban work, as much as the socio-cultural atmosphere of the cities themselves, was very different from what they had left behind. Only a small proportion were truly proletarianized by the 1910s and 1920s — in

the sense of being permanent workers in the modern wage-earning sector of the urban economy, totally dependent on wage-labour for their living and in an employer/employee relationship. But as the industrialization and commercialization of the colonial economy increased, a slow process of proletarianization was taking place.

The growth of the commercial and industrial sectors of the urban economy and the changed priorities of the colonial government after 1901, under its Ethical Policy, resulted in a rapid expansion of Western-style education, both government and private. This expansion is illustrated by the number of Indonesian students enrolled in the Second Class Native Schools, the lower level vernacular schools from which came many of the colony's clerical, administrative and artisan workers. In 1900 there were 98,173 pupils enrolled in these schools. By 1910 enrolments had reached 232,629; by 1920, 357,970; and by 1925, 445,672. A similar rate of expansion occurred in the First Class Native Schools, in 1914 reorganized into the Hollandsch-Inlandsche Scholen (HIS), where the medium of instruction was Dutch, as well as of Indonesian enrolments in the European Lower Schools.[95]

The expanding colonial economy demanded Indonesian administrators, teachers and skilled workers, readily absorbing the graduates of both vernacular and Dutch language schools. Not until the Depression began to affect the colony severely in 1931 was it difficult for well-educated or skilled Indonesians to get jobs. Far from satisfying their desire for access to the better paid and higher status jobs in the colony, the rapid structural changes and changes in occupation profile only increased Indonesians' frustration at the limits imposed by colonial rule. Despite the speed of social and economic change in the colony, the colour barrier remained firmly in place.

Employment in the Indies was largely defined by race. The growth of the commercial and industrial sectors of the urban economy after 1870, together with the expansion of educational opportunities for Indonesians, inevitably forced a re-classification of employment categories in the colony. Naturally, this was attractive to employers because Indonesian labour was considerably cheaper than that of Europeans or Eurasians. The First World War was a further major stimulus to this process. The disruption caused by the war forced the sugar factories, and the railway companies whose fortunes were tied to them, to purchase more locally manu-

factured machinery and metal products than hitherto. A considerable expansion in the Surabaya-based engineering industry resulted. But during the war industry and commerce in the colony was able to recruit very few young Dutchmen. Not until 1920, when the post-war shipping shortage eased, were government and privately owned enterprises able to restore their recruitment of young Dutchmen to pre-war levels.

The war years accelerated a process, clearly evident in the early 1900s, of Indonesians being assigned to jobs previously the preserve of Europeans or Eurasians. For example, in the late nineteenth century engine drivers, station masters and administrative personnel on the railways were almost entirely Europeans, as were a large percentage of the train conductors. By 1914 a majority of engine drivers, station masters, clerks and conductors were Indonesians, with Europeans having moved to supervisory positions. By 1915 only the State Railways employed Europeans as engine drivers, and then only on a small scale. Similarly, the European labour shortage during the war stimulated the training of Indonesian typists, with the result that this quickly became regarded as a native occupation.

A better educated Indonesian workforce, encouraged to acquire new skills and take on new responsibilities, developed different views of their society from earlier generations. Their work experiences were different, as were their hopes and expectations of life. Consumption expectations were also rising, aided not only by the example of affluent Europeans, but also by cultural changes such as the flourishing of local cinemas whose programmes included advertisements exhorting audiences to buy all sorts of consumer goods. Indeed, the cinema may have been an important influence on expanding urban workers' perceptions of the world and their place in it. The colonial government was so concerned about the possible impact of the cinema on urban Indonesians that in 1918 it ordered the Royal Cinema in Semarang to stop showing the film *Rasputin* because it might incite its Indonesian audiences.[96]

These social and economic changes are the key to understanding the changes that also occurred in urban Indonesians' political consciousness. The formation of Budi Utomo in 1908 by students at the Medical School in Batavia marks the formal beginning of the nationalist movement. Although having a radical wing in its early Batavian days, Budi Utomo quickly moved its base

to Yogyakarta and became a moderate, Javanese aristocrat-dominated organization. A multitude of nationalist parties, student organizations and religious, educational and cultural bodies emerged in the 1910s. Some were short lived, such as the multi-racial Indische Partij and Insulinde, but others developed into strong and influential organizations. The most important political organization was Sarekat Islam, the Islamic nationalist party founded in Yogyakarta in 1912. Sarekat Islam spread rapidly as it tapped the restlessness brought about by the rapid social and economic changes taking place in rural and urban Java. It both built upon and contributed to the Islamic revival that had been gaining momentum in the colony since the late nineteenth century. That same year, 1912, also witnessed the formation of Muhammadiyah, an Islamic reform association initially confined to Java but quickly spreading to Sumatra. Sarekat Islam became the most influential Islamic party in the nationalist movement, while Muhammadiyah quickly created a network of schools, clinics, co-operatives and other social welfare agencies.[97]

Sarekat Islam achieved its peak membership between 1912 and 1916, enrolling hundreds of thousands of members in rural and urban Java as well as in Sumatra and eastern Indonesia. It was involved in the so-called Section B Affair in Garut, west Java, in 1919, when a number of farmers who were prominent local members resisted government orders to deliver their rice crops at fixed prices. It was also involved in a number of other peasant disturbances in Java in the 1910s.[98] After the end of the First World War, though, it increasingly turned its attention to the urban areas, becoming, as we shall see, closely involved with worker militancy and in organizing workers into labour unions. Sarekat Islam was not alone in its search for an urban constituency. A small group of Dutch socialists formed the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDV) in Semarang in 1914 and worked to influence the intellectual development of the younger generation of Indonesian graduates from Dutch-language schools. In this they were highly successful, attracting many Indonesians who were to play important roles in the Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam and who, in 1920, were to become the core of the Indies Communist Party (PKI).[99]

Sarekat Islam, the ISDV, the PKI and the many other Indonesian nationalist and social-economic organizations stimulated public debate on social, economic and political issues. Each organ-

ization regularly produced its own broadsheet, which surveyed members' feelings and opinions and tried in simple language to develop a broader understanding of their society and the impact of colonialism on it. In 1914 Sarekat Islam itself launched two major daily newspapers, *Oetoesan Hindia* in Surabaya and *Sinar Djawa* (later renamed *Sinar Hindia*) in Semarang, which combined ordinary day-to-day reporting with strong critiques of the colonial system. The formula was much the same in other Malay language daily newspapers founded in the 1910s in Batavia, Bandung and Yogyakarta. These newspapers, journals and pamphlets were widely read by the growing number of literate Indonesians and were valuable educational material for political parties and labour unions.

The debates in labour union and nationalist party meetings, and the reporting by contemporary Malay and Dutch language newspapers, make it clear that the work experience was central to the changing consciousness of urban dwellers in the 1910s and 1920s. Many were becoming increasingly aware of the huge wage differentials between themselves and Europeans — even when performing the same job — as well as of the obvious luxury in which company owners and administrators lived at the other end of town. Feelings of antagonism were particularly strong among skilled workers because of their exposure to the ideas of the urban intellectuals and also because of their resentment at the blatant racial barriers to economic advancement. Resentment seems to have been aroused earliest among workers in the expanding rail and tramway networks. This industry employed more urban workers on a permanent basis than any other and was the first to create strict employer/employee relationships with carefully drafted service regulations and defined career and wage structures. The occupational mobility of railway workers, their residence in separate railway kampungs owned by the railway companies, with their own sporting teams and cultural facilities, their relatively high literacy rate and the fact that many of them worked closely with Europeans all contributed to the development of race and group consciousness.

Their growing sensitivities to injustices in society and to the arbitrary ways in which they were treated by Europeans were accompanied by a deepening resentment of racial inequalities. An Indonesian in 1914 explained that one of the major private railway companies had a regulation which prohibited children or natives

from buying season tickets. Such belittling of natives he considered intolerable:

> Children and natives! Such a restriction arouses the same bitterness and sense of humiliation as the sign 'Orang ketjil' on the carriages set aside for natives by some of the tram companies. They must bear in mind that the industry is carried on for the most part by drivers, station workers and train officials who are the so-called 'Orang ketjil'. They should show more respect to those whose labour created so much profit for them.[100]

Urban Indonesians' consciousness of the racial barriers in the colony and their refusal any longer to accept inferior status is illustrated by a report in the *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad* in November 1914. The article relates how a well-dressed European, when asked to pay his fare by an Indonesian conductor on a Batavian tram, took his money from his pocket, delivered the conductor a withering look, and, instead of putting the money into the conductor's outstretched hand, slammed it down on the seat beside him. With the shaking of the tram, his money fell under the seat, whereupon the European passenger glared at the conductor again, clearly expecting him to bend down and pick it up. Instead, the conductor stood there with hand outstretched and eyes fixed firmly on those of the passenger. The Dutchman, startled by this defiant attitude, reluctantly picked up the money himself, once again placing it on the seat beside him. This time the conductor collected the money but returned the change and the ticket to the seat from where it fell yet again under the seat. Triumphantly, the conductor walked away while the European was again forced to swallow his pride or lose his money.[101]

Workers' demands for improved housing, reduced hours of work, or higher wages were stimulated by a growing awareness that European employees were much better treated than Indonesians. A Javanese railway worker in 1914 complained about differential treatment for natives and Europeans, noting particularly the regulation that if a European was killed at work a pension was paid to his family — but not if an Indonesian was killed:

> Europeans and natives, answer this question. Why does the European employee receive a higher salary than his native colleague and why are natives in a much more unfavourable position in regard to pension rights? Even if they perform the same work. How can this be? The answer can be

nothing less than this. As long as the plantation employers profit from the submissiveness, the meekness, the backwardness, the deprivation of the natives . . . so will the railway companies. They continue their unfairness without any feelings of guilt. The value of labour is not a matter of right or unright, fairness or unfairness — vague words without content. What the railway companies do, they can do because of the helplessness of the employed, because they still have not realized their own interests.[102]

Another Javanese railway worker wrote to the editor of his union journal lamenting that while European employees could take a month's vacation each year with allowances, a native could only take two weeks — without any allowances at all. The system, he asserted, was manifestly unjust: 'Is it any wonder that a cry for equal rights is rising up from the Javanese world?'[103] Another letter in 1915 argued for equality of opportunity for Indonesians. While one saw second-class Indonesian clerks at railway stations, the station masters were always Europeans:

People so often say that the natives have little ability. That I find unjust . . . We natives are happy and proud that we work on stations as conductors, because by this we demonstrate that we are able to do the same work as our European colleagues. We most certainly do possess ability.[104]

Again in 1916 a Semarang railway worker complained of the problems and high cost involved in getting suitable housing in Semarang, made more difficult because Indonesians were paid less than Europeans for the same job and were therefore unable to compete for good housing. The frustrations of the correspondent — probably a first- or second-class clerk — were expressed by the clear implication that a native official deserved better than having to live in a poor kampung:

How can the native, who now demands a level of hygiene as good as the Westerner, make ends meet with his wages if the Westerner cannot do so even though their respective incomes stand in the relationship of 1:2 — their needs are the same.[105]

The development of race and group consciousness among urban workers extended beyond the ranks of the literate few. The ferment was much more widespread, involving considerable changes in attitudes to authority and much greater awareness of

the inequalities of life in cities. The traditional indigenous wielders of authority — such as Regents, *patih* or kampung heads — no longer possessed the same powers of patronage in the towns and cities and were no longer able to count on the politics of deference in maintaining social control.[106] By the 1910s there were in the kampungs a growing number of alternative channels of leadership, patronage and power — both formal, including labour unions, political parties and mutual aid organizations, and informal, including kampung landlords, factory or workshop foremen and local union or religious leaders. The shapers of opinion in the kampungs and the possessors of influence and patronage were increasingly the Indonesian foremen, supervisors and literate workers. As we shall see, labour unions assiduously recruited these people as branch leaders, and often when an effective strike occurred it was because these people could draw on their informal power and influence to persuade the mass of workers to follow their example.

For workers in the modern sector of the economy it was the 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week of work experience that largely shaped their views of the world. It opened up new perspectives on colonial society, made them conscious of the racial inequality and provided informal links of friendship with fellow workers or clientage with foremen or supervisors. Work, discussion with others at work, the cinema, the advertisements, the amusement parks, the kampung sporting clubs and the voluntary organizations, all played a crucial part in shaping the urban workers' views of the world and their mounting sense of injustice. The key to worker militancy and political involvement was the relationships created among workers in one institution, in one workshop and when working for one foreman or employer. Voluntary organizations emerged out of the work experience and the relationships formed there. Involvement in urban voluntary organizations, together with the work-defined bonds of patronage and power, prepared urban workers for the appeals of labour unions and nationalist parties.

1. See, The Siauw Giap, 'Urbanisatieproblemen in Indonesie', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 115 (1959), pp. 249-76.
2. This point is made by G. J. Hugo, 'Population Movements in Indonesia

during the colonial period', in J. A. C. Mackie *et al* (eds), *Indonesia: Australian Perspectives* (Canberra, 1980), pp. 95-136.

3. Ibid, p. 112.
4. The Siauw Giap, op. cit., pp. 249-50.
5. See, C. A. Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur, 1983).
6. See below, Chapter III.
7. For a brief history of the development of industry in Indonesia see, H. J. van Oorschot, *De Ontwikkeling van de Nijverheid in Indonesia* ('s-Gravenhage, 1956).
8. For an illustrated history of the development of railways and tramways see J. A. Duparc, *Trams en tramlijnen: de elektrische stadstrams op Java* (Rotterdam, 1972).
   A *kampung* is a neighbourhood in a town or city occupied by non-Europeans, often with its own administrative structure and mutual aid organizations and usually with its own guard system. The best descriptions of living conditions in the late colonial cities in Java are to be found in translated contemporary reports published in *The Indonesian Town: Studies in Urban Sociology* (The Hague, 1958).
9. *Volksstelling 1930*, Vol 8 (Batavia, 1936), pp. 122-3.
   The 1930 Census, the most thorough of the colonial censuses, calculated that 30–40 per cent of the Indonesian workforce of Batavia, Semarang, Surabaya and Bandung worked as day-wage labourers or domestic servants. Many would have been circular migrants.
10. See, *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart der Inlandsche Bevolking op Java en Madoera*, Part 6d (Batavia, 1912), pp. 1-17.
11. For a discussion of the general problem of internal migration in colonial Indonesia see, Hugo, op. cit. There is a discussion of rural migration to the towns and cities in *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart*, op. cit., Part 6d, pp. 1-17.
12. See, *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart*, op. cit., Part 6c, pp. 159-61.
13. Hugo, op. cit., p. 114.
14. *Rapport van het Hoofd van Het Kantoor van Arbeid over de Arbeidstoestanden in de Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja* (Batavia, 1926), p. 9.
15. *Volksstelling 1920*, p. 136.
16. *Handbook of the Netherlands East-Indies, 1930* (Batavia, 1930), p. 73.
17. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit., pp. 8-9. Between 1910 and 1914 the average number of Indonesians (that is from the whole of the Indies, not just Java) in schools giving Western primary education was only 23,910 per year, and in Western secondary schools only 135 per year. Between 1920 and 1924, the averages were 51,308 and 2,602 respectively and in 1928, 74,697 and 6,468. See, G. Mc T. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, 1952), p. 31.
18. P. Levert, *Inheemsche Arbeid in de Java-Suikerindustrie* (Wageningen, 1934), p. 113.
19. 'De leerling-machinisten bij de NIS', *Volharding*, 20 May 1916.
20. *Jaarboek, Departemen van het Landbouw, Nijverheid en Handel, 1916* (Weltevreden, 1916), p. 211.
    At the end of 1917 the Batavia Trade School had 197 pupils, that in Semarang had 124 pupils and that in Surabaya 87 pupils.

21. See, *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit.
22. Levert, op. cit., pp. 111-12.
23. There is an interesting comparison between the role of a foreman in Java and the role of a jobber in the Bombay cotton mills. On the latter see, R. Newman, *Workers and Unions in Bombay 1918–1929. A Study of Organisation in the Cotton Mills* (Canberra, 1981).
24. See, Notes of a Meeting of the Central Executive of the General Syndicate of Sugar Factories in the Netherlands-Indies, 11 December 1918, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6755.
25. There is some discussion of the crucial role of foremen in *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit.
26. Ibid, p. 13.
27. See, Oorschot, op. cit.
28. Head of Operations Semarang-Cirebon Steamtram Society [SCSM] to Chief Representative SCSM, 6 May 1922, Sister Societies Common Archives, 743-II.
29. Head of Operations SCSM to Chief Representative SCSM, 4 August 1913, Sister Societies Common Archives, 744-1.
30. *Volharding*, 7 September 1915.
31. *Volharding*, 7 August 1915.
32. *Si Tetap*, 31 July/31 August 1925.
33. *Verslag der Staatsspoor- en Tramwegen in Nederlandsch-Indie over het Jaar 1918* (Weltevreden, 1920), Part 2, pp. 36-40.
34. *Rapport van het onderzoek naar de dienst en rusttijden van het Spoor- en Tramweg personeel op Java* (Semarang, 1914).
35. *Volharding*, 31 December 1914.
36. *Volharding*, 31 December 1914.
37. *Volharding*, 22 December 1915.
38. Levert, op. cit., p. 114.
39. Ibid, pp. 139-40.
40. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit., pp. 7-8.
41. Ibid, p. 11.
42. *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart*, op. cit., Part 6d, p. 17.
43. *Locomotief*, 22 January 1912.
44. Cited in R. E. Elson, 'Sugar and Peasants: The Social Impact of the Western Sugar Industry on the Peasantry of the Pasuruan Area, East Java, From the Cultivation System to the Great Depression', Ph.D thesis, Monash University, 1979, p. 408, n. 118.
45. Chairman JSWB to Chairman Beniso, 21 February 1924, enclosed in Secretary Beniso to Members, No B822, 24 March 1924, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6764.
46. Levert, op. cit., pp. 120–21.
47. See *Batik Rapport. Rapport betreffende eene gehouden enquete naar de arbeidstoestanden in de battikerijen op Java en Madoera door den Inspecteur bij het Kantoor van Arbeid* (Weltevreden, 1930–33).
48. *Api*, 10 August 1925.
49. *Darmo Kondo*, 3 March 1919, in *IPO* 10 (1919), p. 1.
50. *Neratja*, 23 April 1921, in *IPO* 17 (1921), p. 157.
51. *Volharding*, 7 May 1915.

52. *Volharding*, 25 September 1919.
53. Levert, op. cit., pp. 193-4.
54. Chairman JSWB to Chairman Beniso, 21 February 1924, enclosed in Secretary Beniso to Members, No B 822, 24 March 1924, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6764.
55. Levert, op. cit., p. 194.
56. See indices of prices of rice and other basic commodities in W.M.F. Mansvelt and P. Creutzberg (eds), *Changing Economy in Indonesia*, Vol. 4, Rice Prices (The Hague, 1978), Table 1, pp. 45-6.
57. *Verslag van de Arbeidscommissie betreffende de wettelijke vaststelling van minimuum-loonen voor werknemers op Java en Madoera* (Weltevreden, 1920), p. 11; see also, A.M.P.A. Scheltema, 'Zijn Minimuumloonen voor Java en Madoera nu Urgenter dan in 1921?', *Koloniale Studien* 20, 3 (1936), pp. 81-108.
58. *Verslag . . . . betreffende de wettelijke vaststelling van minimuum-loonen*, op. cit., pp. 34-8.
59. See below, p. 211.
60. See, Scheltema, op. cit., p. 94.
61. *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaat*, op. cit., 6d, p. 19.
62. See *Verslag . . . betreffende de wettelike vaststelling van minimuum-loonen*, op. cit.
63. J. van den Bosch, 'Report on his activities in the Indies, 1830–1833', in C.L.M. Penders (ed.), *Indonesia: Selected Documents on Colonialism and Nationalism 1830–1942* (St Lucia, 1977), p. 13.
64. E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present* 38 (1967), pp. 56-97.
65. Ibid.
66. *Verslag omtrent de Koeliemoeilijkheden in de Haven van Soerabaia gedurende Augustus/September 1921* (Soerabaia, 1921), p. 8.
67. See, e.g., *Kaoem Moeda*, 16 June 1919, in *IPO* 25 (1919), p. 12 and *Neratja*, n.d., in *IPO* 24 (1920), p. 3.
68. See B. Roberts, *Cities of Peasants* (London, 1978), p. 128ff.
69. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit., p. 48.
70. 'The Living Conditions of Municipally Employed Coolies in Batavia in 1937', in *The Indonesian Town: Studies in Urban Sociology*, p. 223.
71. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit., pp. 62-3.
72. In 1924 it was calculated that 94 per cent of all pawns were less than f10 in value, with an average value of f2.34. *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Nederlandsche-Indie*, March 1924.
73. 'Report from the Amsterdam Trading Company on how native employees spent their bonuses in 1920', enclosed in Amsterdam Trading Company to General Secretary of the Government of the Netherlands Indies, 19 February 1921, Secret Mail Report, 1921/246.
74. See, *Sinar Hindia*, 4 February 1922 and *Oetoesan Hindia*, 18 February 1922.
75. *Volharding*, 31 December 1914.
76. W. F. Wertheim and The Siauw Giap, 'Social Change in Java, 1900–1930', *Pacific Affairs* 35 (1962), p. 233. See also: J. L. Cobban, 'Uncontrolled Urban Settlement: the Kampong Question in Semarang, 1905–1940', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 130, 5 (1974), pp. 403-27; W. H. Frederick,

'Indonesian Urban Society in Transition: Surabaya, 1926–1946', Ph.D thesis, University of Hawaii, 1978, and *The Indonesian Town*, op. cit.

77. J. L. Cobban, 'The City on Java: An Essay in Historical Geography', Ph.D thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1970, p. 189.
78. The Pest Danger Ordinance of 1904 gave local governments power to destroy houses where the plague was prevalent. See, ibid.
79. *Volharding*, 5 June 1916.
80. *Volharding*, 20 August 1916.
81. *Volharding*, 5 April 1918.
82. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit., p. 150.
83. 'OJS dan tjaranja mengisep', *Si Tetap*, 30 November 1925.
84. Ibid.
85. D.J.A. Westeveld, 'Woning toestanden onder de Javaansche bevolking te Semarang', *Gemeenteblad Semarang* 8 (1914), p. 345.
86. Ibid, p. 356.
87. The investigation was published in *Nieuwe Soerabajaasch Courant*, 27 November 1927.
88. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaja*, op. cit., p. 62.
89. *Volharding*, 25 October 1919.
90. For a discussion of this theme see Cobban, 'The City on Java', op. cit. See also the essays in *The Indonesian Town*, op. cit., and the early chapters in Frederick, 'Indonesian Urban Society', op. cit.
91. See, *The Indonesian Town*, op. cit., and Frederick, 'Indonesian Urban Society', op. cit.
92. For a discussion of the impact of opium see J. R. Rush, 'Opium Farms in Nineteenth-Century Java: Institutional Continuity and Change in a Colonial Society, 1860–1910', Ph.D thesis, Yale University, 1977.
93. See, R. D. Cr. Ph. Simons, 'Indrukken over de prostitutie en de homosexueele prostitutie, en over het voorkomen van geslachtsziekten in Ned Oost-Indie en West-Indie', *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskundig* 83, Parts 47, 48 and 49, pp. 5574-9, 5689-93 and 5755-6.
94. *Nieuwe Soerabajaasche Courant*, 22 November 1927.
95. These figures are contained in tables published in H. A. Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indie* (The Hague, 1982), Vol 1, 1927–1928, pp. xvii-xxv.
96. *Locomotief*, 8 April 1918.
97. On Sarekat Islam see: R.T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca, 1965); A.P.E. Korver, *Sarekat Islam 1912–1916* (Amsterdam, 1982), and Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Protest Movements in Rural Java* (Singapore, 1973). On Muhammadiyah see, D. Noer, *The Modernist Islam Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Singapore, 1973).
98. See, W. A. Oates, 'The Afdeeling B: An Indonesian case study', *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 9, 1 (1968), pp. 107-16 and Sartono, op. cit.
99. For a discussion on the activities of the ISDV and the formation of the PKI, see, McVey, op. cit.
100. *Volharding*, 15 July 1914.
101. *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 26 November 1914.
102. 'Gelijk werk, gelijk rechten', *Volharding*, 15 July 1914.
103. *Volharding*, 31 August 1914.

104. *Volharding*, 7 November 1915.
105. *Volharding*, 22 January 1916.
106. A Regent was the highest-ranking Javanese official in the Indonesian arm of the colonial administration. A *patih* was the administrative deputy of the Regent. Java was administratively divided into Residencies, each headed by a European Resident. Residencies were typically subdivided into three to five Regencies, each with a Javanese Regent as the head of the Indonesian administration and a European Assistant Resident as head of the parallel European administration. For a general discussion, see H. Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore, 1979).

II
The Emergence of Labour Unions

On 22 January 1903 three master shunters and ten pointsmen failed to turn up for work at the Semarang station of the Semarang-Joana Steamtram Company (SJS).[1] Realizing that they were on strike rather than simply sick, after two days the company sought them out and discovered they had three major grievances: the work was too heavy, wages were too low and they objected to having to produce a doctor's certificate when sick. The driving force behind the strike seems to have been the oldest of the master shunters, a man in the SJS employ since 1884 who strongly objected to the company's system of fines which had cost him f4 in December for being away from work without an acceptable excuse. The SJS rejected most of the strikers' demands, but agreed to consider a request for higher wages in a month's time if they returned to work immediately. This they did on 26 January. In February the master shunters' monthly wages were increased by f5 but the pointsmen who had followed their lead and joined them on strike received nothing.

What the Operations Manager of the SJS referred to as 'a storm in a tea cup' was typical of hundreds of labour disputes which broke out spontaneously in Java well before the formation of labour unions. The Central Bureau for Statistics compiled figures on labour disputes which, while the data base may not be totally reliable, nevertheless give some indication of the general pattern. According to the Bureau, between 1901 and 1905 there was an average of 120.6 strikes per year in the colony, rising to an average of 137 per year in the five years 1906 to 1910. An estimated average of 11,882 people went on strike each year between

1901 and 1906, with an estimated average of 7,841 people per year in the next five years.[2]

Given the smallness of the urban workforce and the probability that the Bureau of Statistics received information from larger employers only, these figures represent a significant level of direct action by Indonesian workers. As far as can be ascertained, they were all short-lived spontaneous protests by small groups of workers whose dissatisfaction with their lot was brought to the surface by some minor immediate grievance. In many cases aggrieved workers first sought redress from their foremen or from European supervisors, often directly confronting European managers as a group, sometimes with their foremen as spokesmen. While successful negotiations have gone unrecorded, presumably workers were often able to resolve their grievances this way. However, when employers rejected or ignored workers' petitions, they often responded by simply walking off the job. Few of these strikes lasted beyond two or three days; many were resolved in a matter of hours.

The usual response of European managers to a sudden walkout was to inform the local *patih*, *wedana* or Assistant Resident, one or more of whom then came to the workplace to talk with the strikers. It was indicative of the lack of communications between European managers and Indonesian workers, or of any concept of industrial relations, that it took a government official to discover workers' grievances. Usually these officials sternly lectured strikers on the serious consequences of not returning to work immediately, but as well they often acted as mediators, convincing managers of the genuineness of workers' grievances and the need for them to be redressed. What little leadership there was behind these early strikes usually came from older workers or foremen, whose status and informal power in the workplaces and the kampungs gave them considerable influence over ordinary workers. Certainly, the impetus and leadership for the strikes came from among the discontented workers themselves with no involvement by outside persons or groups. As Ravinder Kumar has argued in relation to Bombay cotton mill workers, pre-union strikes have very similar characteristics to peasant protest movements and uprisings. Like the peasant protests, early urban strikes occurred spontaneously, were sudden outbursts of pent-up frustrations and longstanding grievances, and lacked class consciousness, class organization or even formal leadership. Their goals were limited

to redressing immediate and local grievances, with no sense of being part of a wider social movement.[3]

WORKERS, DISPUTES AND SAREKAT ISLAM

THE efforts of urban workers to improve their lot intensified after the formation of the Islamic nationalist organization, Sarekat Islam, in 1912. Isolated, spontaneous strikes still occurred in large numbers — it was not until 1917 that Sarekat Islam began to organize workers directly — but now workers had an organization to which they could turn when in dispute with employers. Many saw Sarekat Islam as 'their' organization — their ally against injustice and oppression. The insecurity of life in the kampungs, where physical conditions were deteriorating, traditional support structures lacking and perceptions of the world undergoing speedy changes, caused many urban dwellers to search for a new order in their lives. Sarekat Islam offered a sense of comradeship and purpose. Urban workers, especially the skilled and the literate, flocked to the Sarekat Islam branches where they discussed social and economic issues, including, of course, those issues which affected them directly — wages and conditions in the workplaces. Local Sarekat Islam leaders were thereby drawn into labour disputes, initially as advisers and mediators, but very quickly as providers of the outside leadership which urban workers had hitherto lacked.

Government and newspaper reports on the early years of Sarekat Islam consistently referred to its widespread social and moral influence wherever a branch was established. Attendances at mosques greatly increased, there was a noticeable reduction in gambling and drinking and there were sustained campaigns against prostitution.[4] Sarekat Islam in its early years had a puritanical streak as it tried to cleanse Indonesian society of the evil influences of secularization and Westernization. As part of this religious revival, from late 1912 it began to agitate for Muhammad's birthday to be proclaimed a holiday for urban workers and for employers to permit workers to take time off work to attend the mosque each Friday. Both issues challenged urban employers and the government to come to terms with revivalist Islam and a more assertive workforce.

In January 1913 Sarekat Islam leaders announced that Muhammad's birthday late in February should be a rest day. Mem-

bers were urged through the pages of its newspaper, *Oetoesan Hindia*, through pamphlets and at meetings, to stay away from work that day. The call for unilateral action was effective, particularly in Surabaya where many factories were severely affected and the harbour was brought to a standstill because all seamen stayed home.[5] In a number of cases workers had approached their employers in late January or early February, but had received unsympathetic responses. Requests to managers were usually made by a foreman. In some cases this led to the dismissal of foremen as managers became angry at their new role as advocates for the workers.

One such case was in a Surabaya engineering company in February when a foreman was dismissed, accused of incompetence, on the same day on which he had submitted a request for workers to have a free day on Muhammad's birthday. Immediately, almost all of the Indonesian workers, some 350 men, went on strike. The company appealed to the Resident, who requested the local Regent to tell Sarekat Islam leaders that they must bring the strike to a speedy end. This was no easy task, given the bonds of patronage, indebtedness and even fear between foremen and workers. Despite an appeal from the Surabaya chairman of Sarekat Islam, workers refused to return until the dismissed foreman was reinstated.[6] After four days most workers returned, but those considered ringleaders were not re-employed. Indeed, the company launched private prosecutions against four foremen for incitement of workers, but found that the Courts did not share its interpretation of the law.[7]

Persuading workers to stay at home on one day of the year was a major triumph for Sarekat Islam, reflecting its growing influence in urban areas. Persuading employers to allow workers time off work on Fridays so that they could attend the mosque was more difficult. It advocated at meetings and in the press at least a half day's leave and encouraged workers to take direct action where negotiations failed. Again, requests to managers were generally made by foremen and once more foremen were sometimes dismissed for their temerity, an action which usually caused workers immediately to go on strike. In most cases where strikes occurred, the companies held firm and ringleaders were dismissed. Often, though, workers simply stayed away from work on Fridays, or else came back late after the midday meal break. They were repeatedly urged by *Oetoesan Hindia* to take their destiny into

their own hands: 'Long live Sarekat Islam!! Death to its enemies, that is our curse! We trust in our Good God'.[8] Fines were imposed, pay docked and attendance bonuses forfeited, but gradually many companies decided that it was far easier to concede the issue. Workers were increasingly allowed to take an hour or two off work, in some cases with loss of pay, but in many others through changes to working hours on Fridays.

Early in 1913, the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* printed for the first time a column headed 'work strikes'.[9] Readers were informed that because of the incidence of strikes in recent months this column would become a regular feature. It laid the blame at the feet of the 'revolutionaries' in Sarekat Islam, whom it accused of stirring up otherwise contented workers. Certainly, there was a rash of strikes in 1913, especially in Surabaya and Semarang, and undoubtedly the emergence of Sarekat Islam helped increase urban workers' confidence to redress their grievances through direct action. But the sudden rise in the number of strikes followed two years of significant increases in the cost of living for urban workers. Between 1910 and 1912 in Semarang, for example, the price of rice rose 30 per cent, sugar 9 per cent, potatoes 25 per cent, cotton goods 10 per cent, coconut oil 6 per cent and bamboo 90 per cent, while wages remained stagnant.[10] These price rises were very visible to urban workers, sharpening their sense of injustice and making them more receptive to the propaganda of Sarekat Islam. It is not surprising, then, that the level of discontent in the workplaces was higher in 1913, with strikes occurring among a wide range of workers, including in the State Railways, the harbours, the postal and telegraph service, the printing industry and in engineering companies at Batavia and Surabaya.

The pattern of strikes was, however, little different from those of previous years. Most were short-lived protests by workers demanding increases in wages in line with increased prices or demanding an end to arbitrary treatment of one kind or another. The initiative and leadership still came from within the ranks of the discontented workers, with the strikes occurring suddenly without preparation let alone organization. They came to an end just as suddenly: some strikers achieved all or part of their demands, but in other conflicts employers responded either by immediately sacking the workers and employing new labour or issuing an ultimatum that they return to work straight away, failing which they would be sacked.

The two general issues, inadequate wages and a sense of injustice at treatment by their immediate bosses, were behind the strike of day-wage labourers at the State Railways transhipment station of Rambipuji in east Java on 8 May 1913.[11] The labourers stayed away from work after their request to the station master for higher wages was rejected. The labourers carried goods from the terminus of a narrow gauge branch line to wagons on the main line. The strikers were all from nearby Jember and were brought to Rambipuji on a daily basis when work was available. They supplemented the permanent labourers who lived in Rambipuji itself. These permanent labourers did not join the strike. Not only were they better paid than the day-wage labourers but the European station master was accused of giving all the heavy transhipment work to the men from Jember. The day-wage labourers' demand for higher wages reflected their sense of injustice that they were being exploited in favour of another group of workers. The State Railways Inspector responded to the strike by bringing other day-wage labourers from the Jember station to Rambipuji, but it was not long before they too walked off the job after their fellow Jember strikers explained their grievances to them. The Inspector then ordered forty permanent labourers from Jember to go to Rambipuji, but they refused and were immediately dismissed. This sense of solidarity became even more apparent when news of the dismissals filtered through to the Jember station. All the station labourers then marched to the station master's office, handed in their armbands (on which were printed their employee numbers), and, as one reporter wrote, 'amidst general cheering they left the station'.[12] All were dismissed and refused further employment, despite an inquiry by the Assistant Resident at Jember revealing that the original grievances of the day-wage labourers were not without substance. The State Railways could take such a stand because it had no difficulty in recruiting replacement workers for the unskilled jobs from surrounding towns and villages. Nevertheless, for some time afterwards the State Railways had to protect new labourers brought to Rambipuji from the wrath of the dismissed Jember strikers by allowing them to sleep under police guard at the station.[13]

There were many other strikes over wages in a wide range of industries in 1913, including major ones such as the printing and engineering industries and in the Semarang harbour.[14] By no means all strikes, however, were over wages. Many were connected with

workers' resentment at unfair treatment by their immediate bosses. Most were triggered by seemingly insignificant events, but, from workers' perspectives, these were simply the catalysts which caused long-simmering feelings of injustice to boil over into direct action.

On 16 October 1913, for example, forty-one chief conductors, conductors and apprentice conductors with the East Java Steamtram Company (OJS) in Surabaya stayed away from work. All were dismissed, including the twenty or so who tried to return to work two days later. The immediate cause of the strike was the temporary replacement of a station master at Sepanjang, some distance out of Surabaya, who had left to make the *haj* to Mecca. The OJS offered the job to four chief conductors, all of whom answered that they wanted to stay in Surabaya. A junior conductor was then appointed. One chief conductor, a long-serving man named Astro, wanted the job but had been overlooked, whether deliberately or not is unclear. On the evening of 15 October Astro called a meeting of fellow conductors at his house during which he delivered an angry speech denouncing working conditions for conductors in the OJS, pointing out that they were treated 'like children' and dealt with harshly by European train controllers. Now, he thundered, a junior conductor had been appointed station master at Sepanjang. Were there not suitable older conductors, and was not this treatment unfair? He urged his listeners to strike the following day, to which call there was general assent.[15]

One Surabaya Dutch-language newspaper dismissed the strike as '. . . giving a new, somewhat humorous, view of the way in which the present generation of natives impersonate proletarian ways'.[16] It was, in fact, a clear illustration of the sense of hierarchy which existed not only in the railway industry but in most workplaces. The promotion of a junior conductor breached the senior conductors' sense of rank and status. It was the chief conductors who were most aggrieved, all older men of long service with the OJS, but such was their standing and informal power in the workplace that when they went on strike the younger and more junior conductors joined them.

The informal influence of foremen is further illustrated by the number of strikes which broke out when companies tried to dismiss them. Early in 1912 an ice factory at Batavia dismissed its foreman, accusing him of insolence and laziness. The next day not a single worker turned up at the factory and the strike was only resolved when the foreman was reinstated. A year later, in April

1913, the same foreman was again dismissed for identical reasons. Once more the entire workforce stopped work. Some of the workers returned to work the following day, and when asked why they had gone on strike, said they were supporting the foreman: as he was also a local Sarekat Islam leader they were afraid of the consequences of continuing work. The foreman had apparently gone around the workers' kampungs urging them to strike and had used his position in Sarekat Islam to threaten them with dire consequences if they did not support him. The European *controleur*, the local *patih* and the executive of the Batavia branch of Sarekat Islam all became involved, but Sarekat Islam leaders did not support the reinstatement of the foreman, apparently backing the company's justification for his dismissal. Whether or not other Sarekat Islam leaders were annoyed at the foreman using his position in the party to threaten workers is not known, but clearly the foreman's position in the branch was a good deal weaker than he assumed. The workers were, reluctantly, persuaded to return to work but the dispute flared up again a short time later as they remained upset at the dismissal of their foreman.[17]

The growing number of strikes which broke out as protests against unfair treatment clearly indicates the changing consciousness of many workers and their refusal to accept treatment previously considered normal. Around forty workers at the opium factory in Batavia, for example, went on strike in April 1913 because one of their number had been struck on the face by a European supervisor. The *patih* and *wedana* were called in by the company but their report corroborated the workers' complaint and the European was reprimanded.[18] Not all such strikes had successful conclusions. Seamen in the Cirebon harbour went on strike in February 1913 because their employer had decided to impose a fine on all seamen whenever there was a theft of sugar from one of the boats, unless the seamen named the culprit. There was, apparently, considerable leakage from the sugar sacks between their journey from the wharf to the ships waiting off-shore, but while admitting the leakage the seamen objected to this unfair treatment of them. Their objections were ignored and they were forced to return to work on pain of dismissal.[19]

Employers, along with Dutch newspaper editors, became alarmed by the upsurge of urban unrest in 1913. This, together with the growth of Sarekat Islam in 1912 and 1913, aroused widespread panic in the comfortable European world on Java, with

sugar factories preparing for armed assaults and absurd rumours spreading through European clubs that revolution was in the offing. In explaining the tension among the European community to a politician in the Netherlands Lower House, Governor-General Idenburg concluded that, 'You can have no idea there of the disgusting panic which broke out among Europeans in May and June over Sarekat Islam'.[20] The extent of the panic can be seen by widespread rumours early in August 1913 that there were plans afoot in the native world for a mass murder of Europeans on 24 and 25 August. The Dutch language newspaper *Java Bode* informed its readers that 'The feelings of the natives, fired by religious frenzy, will burst out in the mass murder of Europeans. The rabble, taking advantage of the fanaticism of their fellow men and hiding behind Sarekat Islam, will send murder parties to their targets'.[21]

The Head of Operations of the OJS saw the invisible hand of Sarekat Islam behind the 1913 strike in his company and the Chief Representative of the Sister Societies, of which the OJS was an operating company, opened correspondence with the Commandant of the Second Military Division on Java about possible assistance in the event of a strike.[22] He argued that while a general strike among Indonesian employees was unlikely in the immediate future, there was always the possibility of local strikes. Such strikes had occurred before 'and it is certain that, under the influence of the rising emancipation of the natives, more and more use will be made of this method of struggle'.[23] The policy of the company, he reiterated, was that if a strike occurred then those involved would be dismissed immediately and new recruits sought. If local recruitment was unsuccessful the company intended to seek the temporary provision of forced labour from the army until new workers could be recruited from outside the immediate locality. Moreover, the company was taking the precaution of training European supervisory personnel to carry out the jobs of foremen and engine drivers — two crucial areas of skilled Indonesian labour difficult to replace — and intended to use European office and station staff and to call for assistance from other industries if necessary.

The Indies government was also concerned about a possible general strike in the railway industry, an industry vital to the transport of export crops from the hinterland of Java to the north coast ports, on which the finances of the colony and the prosperity

of Dutch economic interests depended. In September 1914 it issued an Ordinance allowing the use of the military on civil functions for the preservation of public order or the maintenance of essential services in the public or private sectors.[24] The intention was to keep the railways functioning in the event of a strike, but the law was a useful weapon which could be used against strikers in any industry in the colony.

This was the first major change in the colony's laws specifically designed to control urban workers. Strikes were neither prohibited nor restricted, and beyond bureaucratic registration rules there was nothing to stop combination by workers in individual industries or on a colony wide basis. The control of urban labour was primarily through administrative measures and the wide provisions of the Penal Code under which swift action could be taken against anything deemed a threat to 'tranquillity and order'. In such cases, Residents, local officials and the police had wide powers of arrest and detention. Moreover, controls over the Indonesian press and ordinances controlling public speaking ensured that any Indonesian, or for that matter any European, could be arrested and hauled before the Courts for an inflamatory speech or article. The speech and press laws were deliberately vague and all-embracing and this net was cast even wider in the 1920s. Many hundreds of journalists, editors and political activists were jailed or fined under these provisions. Until 1921 urban workers had reasonably untramelled freedom of association and organization. From 1921 through to 1926, however, a series of repressive laws were enacted which in the end made even the most moderate labour union activities increasingly difficult.

Many employers began to organize themselves very early to combat strikes by their Indonesian workforces. Some changed from employing foremen and ordinary workers on weekly wages to employing them on daily wages, in order to be able to put immediate pressure on them in the event of a strike.[25] Others drew up plans to replace strikers with Chinese workers. The growing labour unrest certainly spurred cooperative action by employers in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya. In June 1913 the three shipping companies operating in Tanjong Priok harbour (Batavia) joined forces in deciding that no seaman would be employed by any other company if he had resigned because a demand for improved wages or conditions was refused or if he had gone on strike.[26] In August all the major printing companies in Batavia formed themselves

into an association in order to combat demands from their Indonesian and Chinese workforces. They decided not to employ new workers during a strike at any member company, introduced a common labour contract, dismissal letter and workcard (including fingerprints) and agreed to create a list of names and addresses of workers in the industry in Batavia.[27] The aim was to prevent workers playing one company off against another, in an industry where there was a general shortage of skilled labour, and to create a blacklist of troublemakers. Following this example, engineering companies in Surabaya formed their own association with similar aims in September.[28] These and similar associations in other industries were at first able to do little to lessen the self-interest of individual companies, which continued to pay differential wages and poach skilled workers from each other wherever possible. However, when labour unions emerged during and after the First World War, and uncoordinated local disputes became transformed into union-led strikes, employers associations also became transformed from weak consultative bodies into powerful anti-union organizations.

THE RAILWAY WORKERS' UNION: A CASE STUDY

THE encouragement of private capital in the Indies after 1870 resulted in a steady growth in the numbers of Europeans employed by private companies and by specialized areas of the colonial bureaucracy. In the first decades of the twentieth century these European employees, aware of the development of labour unions in the Netherlands, came to realize that they needed unions themselves in order to protect their interests in the colony. The emergence of nationalist parties — Budi Utomo, the Indische Partij and more particularly Sarekat Islam — further spurred them to action. By the outbreak of the First World War European workers in many areas of government and private employment, including pawnshops, post offices, sugar factories and schools, had begun to unionize. These unions catered largely for European interests, but higher paid Indonesian workers were often accepted as members, though seldom with full voting rights.

The emergence of nationalist political parties was a major factor in convincing European workers of the need to unionize. It

also quickly persuaded better paid Indonesian workers in government employ that their interests were not the same as those of Europeans, even when they were working side by side. Many were irritated by the subordinate role expected of them in European-dominated unions and were convinced by the anti-colonial debates in the Malay language press and at nationalist meetings that they should break away. Until the end of the First World War, however, Indonesian labour unions were restricted to the ranks of government employees, with the notable exception of railway workers. It took the impact of post-war inflation, together with the vigorous expansion of Sarekat Islam in urban Java, for labour unions to be created for Indonesian workers in private employment.

Some Europeans in the colony welcomed the development of labour unions for Indonesian workers. The Dutch socialists were generally supportive, but many were also torn between their desire to see workers organized and their ideological preference for class-based unions rather than unions based on race. European unions were ambivalent. Some at first cooperated with Indonesian unions by giving advice and support in their formative years. Others saw the benefits that might flow from joint action immediately after the War when severe inflation affected European and Indonesian workers alike. However, the racial division in the colony was too strong for cooperation to last very long. Even where Europeans had major grievances against employers they were enormously better off than Indonesian workers, including those who did much the same work. In the end, all Europeans in the colony, whether government officials, employers or employees, were part of a privileged elite which, with very few exceptions, at times of labour conflict closed ranks against the Indonesian unions.

While there is little information on the origins and early development of most of these unions, whether European or Indonesian, more information exists on efforts to unionize railway workers and this enables a detailed analysis of the structure, growth, leadership, policies and ordinary workers' involvement in the first and largest labour union in colonial Java. A close study of the early years of this union provides a clearer picture of the broader changes taking place among the urban workforce in the 1910s.

The first labour union in Java was formed in October 1905 by European employees of the State Railways in Bandung, west

Java.[29] The *Staatsspoorbond* (SS Bond — Government Railways Union) was largely restricted to State Railways workers in west Java but a branch was established in Yogyakarta, central Java, in 1909. Control of the union was in European hands, but by September 1910 a majority of its members (826 out of 1,476) were Indonesians, even though they had no voting rights.[30] The SS Bond established a successful mutual aid section for Indonesian members and took up individual and collective grievances with the State Railways management. Realizing the importance of communicating with its Indonesian membership, late in 1909 it launched a Malay language edition of its fortnightly journal. Its attempts to expand into central and east Java failed, though, as it was rapidly outflanked by a rival union based in Semarang.

On the evening of 14 November 1908, some sixty-three European employees of the three Semarang-based private railway companies, the Netherlands Indies Railway Company (NIS), the Semarang-Joana Steamtram Company (SJS) and the Semarang-Cirebon Steamtram Company (SCS), met to establish a *Vereeniging voor Spoor-en Tramweg Personeel in Nederlandsche-Indie* (Union of Rail and Tramway Workers in the Netherlands Indies — VSTP).[31] The seven-man executive were all Europeans, and indeed until 1914 Europeans made up a majority of VSTP members and monopolized positions on the central and branch executives. From the beginning, Indonesians were admitted as members, with full voting rights (unlike the SS Bond), but no effort was made to recruit large numbers of low-level workers. Initially the VSTP drew most of its members and almost all of its leadership from NIS employees, with a growing minority coming from the Semarang-Cirebon Rail and Tramway Company. Branches were established in the major railway towns on the NIS network, from Semarang to Yogyakarta and through central Java along the main line to Surabaya. Branches were small and regular meetings were attended by even smaller numbers. With little funds at its disposal, the VSTP central executive operated for some years from the house of its Semarang secretary. Apart from trying to increase membership, its voluntary staff devoted much of their time to seeking improvements in working conditions and wages from the private railway companies and to representing members' grievances to employers. The scant evidence available indicates that in these early years its main concern was for the interests of Europeans and Eurasians and higher level Indonesian employees.

At this time the composition of the Semarang-based VSTP was little different from that of the Bandung-based SS Bond. Indeed, discussions took place between the two unions in 1910 on a VSTP proposal for amalgamation. Although the SS Bond executive favoured the idea, the proposal was rejected by a referendum of members.[32] The rejection may have reflected the parochialism of most of the early unions in Java, whether European or Indonesian. The SS Bond retained its independence, but became increasingly a Europeans-only union. When in November 1923 it amalgamated with the *Spoorbond*, a Semarang-based union for European workers in the private railways, it had only 1,500 members.[33]

After the failure of its attempt to amalgamate with the SS Bond, the VSTP had to decide whether to remain a small, predominantly European body or to develop into a mass-based union representing the interests of all railway and tramway workers, irrespective of race or status. Some European leaders of the VSTP were prepared to permit Indonesians continued membership provided they remained in passive roles, but others advocated their total exclusion. This division in part reflected the wider debate going on among Europeans in the Indies, many of whom were feeling increasingly threatened by the emergence of nationalist organizations.

In October 1913, Den Hollander, chairman of the VSTP central executive, publicly raised the problem of the VSTP's failure to recruit Indonesian members. He suggested two alternative courses of action. Sarekat Islam could form trade unions for Indonesians, and Indonesian railway workers could join these, leaving the VSTP for Europeans only. Alternatively, the VSTP itself could seek ways of improving contact with Indonesian railway workers.[34] Clearly, Den Hollander preferred the latter alternative, but saw the lack of Indonesian leaders in the VSTP as a major drawback to its implementation. To this end he announced the co-option of Muhammad Jusuf as the first Indonesian member of the VSTP central executive. Jusuf was a clerk in the Semarang-Joana Steamtram Company, an executive member of the Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam and an editor of *Sinar Djawa*, the daily newspaper produced by the Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam. He was fluent in both Malay and Dutch, which, together with his political experience, made him the ideal person to turn Den Hollander's plans into reality.

That Den Hollander and others who shared his views found

themselves in a majority was largely due to the influence of a prominent Dutch socialist, Henk Sneevliet. Sneevliet was chairman of the Netherlands Social Democratic Workers Party (SDAP) - controlled Netherlands Railway Workers Union (NVSTP) up to 1912 when a disagreement with the SDAP over its refusal to support a dockworkers' strike cost him his salaried position. The loss of his job, followed closely by the divorce of his second wife, persuaded him to seek a respite in Indonesia. He arrived in the colony in February 1913 and after a few months working with the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* moved to Semarang to succeed D. M. G. Koch, a fellow socialist, as secretary of the Semarang Commercial Association.[35] Koch and Sneevliet were members of a small but influential group of Dutch socialists in the colony in the 1910s and early 1920s who, while believing in a European mission in the Indies, opposed what they saw as exploitative plantation and commercial interests and sought to create a more just society for the mass of Indonesians. They were a major intellectual influence on many young Indonesians who were later active in labour unions, Sarekat Islam and the PKI. Their homes were open to the Dutch-speaking graduates of the colonial schools who were stimulated by their ideas, impressed by their genuine friendship and often first introduced to socialist writings through their personal libraries.[36]

Sneevliet's contacts with other Dutch socialists in the colony — at the time members of the SDAP but from 1914 founding members of the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDV) — and his experience in the NVSTP quickly drew him into involvement with the Semarang-based VSTP. His international outlook and Marxist convictions deeply influenced his approach to the VSTP. He was concerned that all trade unions in Java be truly multiracial and work for the interest of the Indonesian majority. Moreover, he was convinced that unions in the colony must follow the example of unions in Europe by going beyond a concern with day-to-day workers' grievances, wages and conditions, to the wider role of educating the proletariat on the nature of the capitalist system and in the process raising class consciousness.[37]

In October 1913 the VSTP central executive, swayed by Sneevliet's arguments, decided actively to recruit Indonesian members and at the same time give them a role in the union's leadership. The VSTP Annual General Meeting in February 1914

agreed to reserve three out of seven central executive positions for Indonesians.[38] This marked the end of the first stage of the VSTP's growth and the beginning of its transformation into an Indonesian-controlled union.

During 1914 the new leadership put a great deal of effort into broadening the VSTP from its Semarang-NIS base. Growth was particularly strong among State Railways workers in east Java. At the end of 1913 the VSTP had only 1,242 members (673 Europeans and 569 Indonesians) but by January 1915 it had 2,292 members, with a clear majority (1,439) being Indonesians. The largest branches were in Surabaya, Semarang, Madiun, Surakarta and Yogyakarta.[39] By 1918 more than half of its members were State Railways workers and, although there are no precise figures for later years, it seems that this percentage increased even further by the time of the railway strike of 1923. By the end of 1914 the VSTP had joined the International Transport Workers' Federation, begun a detailed inquiry into working and rest times in the railways and succeeded in gaining a voice in the State Railways' review of conditions in its rail system.[40]

As Indonesians steadily joined the VSTP, meetings were held specifically for them in either Malay or Javanese. As well, ordinary branch meetings began to be conducted in both Dutch and Malay, despite the obvious problems in translating proceedings. At the beginning of 1915 Sneevliet published an open letter in the VSTP's Dutch language journal *Volharding*, entitled 'The Young Javanese and the Union Movement', in which he argued that Java had been drained by Western capitalism and that because of the enormous power of capitalism, strengthened by the influence of employers' organizations on the colonial government, native employees were in a weak position:

> Do you not agree with us that in order to raise the living standards of the Javanese people one of the first conditions is raising the purchasing power and therefore the wages of native workers? And will you not concede that this improvement in their lot can only be achieved by their own efforts in a strong organization? Will you acknowledge that for this purpose a trade union organization is necessary, bringing workers in a specific industry together in common action to improve their lot?[41]

He called on educated young Javanese to give leadership to the uneducated masses. They had a responsibility not only to be

involved in the nationalist movement, but also to realize that labour unions were an area where their idealism and energy could be harnessed into practical advancement of their people.[42] Sneevliet firmly believed in the need for labour unions in the Indies, despite the different stage of development of the Indonesian economy and society from that of Europe, but was also convinced that labour unions must not be mere appendages of political parties. He argued against mixing religion or nationalism with labour union activities, because he saw labour unions cutting across religious and political activities on class lines. For this reason, while he supported Budi Utomo, Sarekat Islam and Insulinde in their political activities, he was opposed to their establishing labour union subsidiaries.[43]

In 1915, as part of the new policy, the VSTP began publishing *Si Tetap*, a Malay language edition of its existing journal *Volharding*, with Muhammad Jusuf as editor. When Indonesians were first elected to the central executive that same year, Jusuf was elected along with three others, including a 16-year-old former State Railways clerk named Semaun. The son of a railway worker, Semaun had come under Sneevliet's influence during the latter's few brief months in Surabaya in 1913, remaining in contact with him after Sneevliet moved to Semarang. A member of the Surabaya branch of Sarekat Islam and literate in both Malay and Dutch, Semaun joined the VSTP's Surabaya branch in the latter half of 1914 and was elected to the branch executive early in 1915. On 1 July 1915 he gave up his State Railways job and moved to Semarang to become a full-time salaried VSTP propagandist and editor of *Si Tetap*.[44]

Semaun's appointment ushered in a period of rapid growth for the VSTP. By December 1916 membership had grown to 4,909; by June 1918 to 7,600. By 1920 the VSTP had established ninety-three branches throughout Java, with a few small branches on the west coast of Sumatra and on the Deli plantation line. The largest branches were at the termini of two or more private railway networks — Cirebon, Semarang and Yogyakarta — and at the State Railways junctions of Surabaya and Madiun, with a much smaller presence in the western region of the State Railways network centred on Batavia and Bandung.[45] Even so, the VSTP's overall membership figures were not very large. At its peak in May 1923 its 13,000 members represented little more than a quarter of the total Indonesian workforce in the rail and tramway

industry in Java.[46] The membership profile seems to have included all employment categories — from skilled artisans to unskilled day labourers — though Indonesian administrative and supervisory personnel joined only in small numbers.[47] Better educated and originating from higher social strata than most railway workers, some of these upper-level personnel joined the European railway unions as associate members while others remained aloof from unions altogether.

Membership figures are, of course, only a small measure of a union's power and cohesion. In some years as little as 30 per cent of those recorded as members paid their dues regularly and even in better years the figure was not much more than 60 per cent.[48] Many other workers who did not join the union, whether from fear of reprisals or scepticism as to the immediate benefits, were nevertheless influenced by its propaganda. Thousands of non-union railway workers signed petitions drawn up by the VSTP in the late 1910s, and reports on local strikes then and in the early 1920s make it clear that non-members as well as members took part.

Apart from its inability to recruit extensively in west Java, the VSTP had great difficulty in organizing workers in the many small private railway and tramway companies linking inland sugar factories to Surabaya, Probolinggo, Pasuruan and other coastal towns in east Java. Wages and working conditions were generally worse in these enterprises than in the large private networks or the State Railways. Most had few formal conditions of employment and relied on managers to pay whatever wages they could get away with in their areas. Hours of work were longer than elsewhere, wages lower and legal protection non-existent. However, strong dependency bonds existed between managers, foremen and workers which were more difficult to sustain in the larger companies. This was a major obstacle to VSTP recruitment, linked as it was to workers' fears of retaliation if they joined the union. The companies fostered these fears and seem to have encouraged foremen and supervisors to warn workers of the consequences of joining the VSTP.[49]

The formal structure of the VSTP, like almost all unions in the colonial period, was designed to maintain central control over the branches. The central executive consisted of a chairman, secretary and treasurer, resident in Semarang, and representatives from all over Java. Owing to the expense of bringing the full

executive together more than two or three times a year, the day-to-day management of the union was in the hands of a daily executive composed solely of Semarang residents. The chairman and secretary were salaried officers from the start: after 1914 so were a number of propagandists and union organizers. There was a small office staff at VSTP headquarters in Semarang which prepared the industrial submissions of the union and supervised the activities of the branches.

Increasingly after 1914 VSTP branch leaders were young men, in their twenties in the main, usually employed as clerks, station officials or conductors, and literate at least in Malay and often in Dutch as well. Literacy and numeracy were, of course, essential for officeholders if minutes were to be taken, correspondence with members and the central executive maintained and account books kept. The VSTP made a special effort to recruit skilled, literate or highly placed workers, such as foremen or station masters, because it realized that these people often had considerable informal power in the workshops, stations, or work-gangs. If these men could be persuaded to join they would bring others with them.

For many, a position on the local executive of the VSTP, or indeed of one of the other unions, was their first experience of a modern organization, and later led to their involvement in nationalist activities. Not all branch executive members were, however, railway workers. Some were what might be called professional union organizers, the most prominent of whom in the VSTP was Djaid, chairman of the Cirebon branch after 1918.[50] Others, like Semaun himself, were ex-railway workers now employed full-time by the VSTP and other unions or by political organizations. Part of the railway companies' response to VSTP industrial action in the 1920s was to dismiss those viewed as ringleaders. Consequently, more and more VSTP branches came to be led by former railway workers, sustained by small salaries from the union.

The VSTP was able to recruit growing numbers of railway workers because it was seen to be successful in defending their interests. It made regular surveys of workers' incomes, allowances, working hours and living conditions, presenting detailed, well-argued cases for improvements to the managements of the two large private railway companies and the State Railways. Pressure from the VSTP forced railway managements to review their wage scales more often than they otherwise would have

done, and made them more aware of the needs of their Indonesian workers and more wary of blatantly unjust action. By the mid 1910s the VSTP was the recognized voice of the Indonesian workforce, with railway managements increasingly prepared to discuss industrial matters with it, even though refusing official recognition. The union was seen by its members as a channel for redressing grievances. Workers who felt unjustly treated turned to local VSTP leaders for assistance in mediating their cause with the companies. In many cases the union was successful.

A regular lament of VSTP secretaries in the 1910s was members' indifference towards, and lack of understanding of, the functions of a union and the difficulty of squeezing dues out of them on a regular month by month basis. In 1916, A.G.P. Wiewel, then VSTP secretary, argued that one of the difficulties was that Indonesians were not accustomed to labour unions that stressed struggle, but rather to mutual support organizations from which they received immediate benefits in return for regular contributions.[51] This was a problem alluded to a number of times by chairmen and secretaries who felt that the reluctance of so many to pay regular dues was because they could see little tangible benefit.[52] It was probably partly to be seen to fulfil this mutual aid function, and thereby attract more Indonesian members, that in 1915 the VSTP established a separate widows' fund. When an Indonesian member died, all Indonesian members were called upon to pay 5 cents to the widows' fund, over and above their membership dues. The contribution rate was increased to 10 cents per month in October 1915. The widows' fund paid out f1,222.45 to eleven Indonesian workers' widows in 1915.[53] As well, some branches established cooperatives to supply members with food and other essentials a few cents below the prices charged in the local stores. But these were a minor part of the VSTP's activities, for it wanted to avoid being seen as just another self-help society.[54]

The expansion of the VSTP's Indonesian membership and the trend toward Indonesian majorities on branch and central executives aroused considerable concern among some Europeans at a time when Indonesians were becoming more stridently nationalistic in Malay and Javanese language newspapers and within Sarekat Islam. The European membership in the VSTP peaked in December 1915 at 1,020 and from then on steadily declined. Early in 1917 a European member voiced his concern in *Volharding* at the trend in the VSTP, arguing that the best solution would be to split the

branches into a European and an Indonesian organization with a central executive consisting of members from the two separate organizations. If in some places it proved impossible to form an Indonesian executive, then he felt sure that Europeans would be prepared to assist in a temporary capacity. Only by splitting the union, he believed, would Europeans join or even remain members. He argued:

> The saying: 'the VSTP is a native union to which Europeans may also belong', is in recent times quite true.
> In every branch, except Semarang, one receives this impression if one attends a meeting. One sees almost no Europeans any more. This situation is also very unpleasant and disheartening for the European members of the branch executive.[55]

The issue was taken up by Semaun at the VSTP Annual General Meeting at Yogyakarta in April 1917, when he proposed that a commission be established to inquire into relations between Europeans and Indonesians in the VSTP. Although some delegates spoke against the proposal on the grounds that it was a move towards schism in the union, Semaun defended it on the grounds that he was not for the moment advocating schism but believed that an investigation had to be made about relations between the two racial groups in the union. He took up this theme in *Volharding* in May, arguing that there should be separate organizations for Europeans and Indonesians at branch level with a common central executive.[56]

Semaun's views on the tension between European and Indonesian members in the VSTP reflected the increasing racial polarization of colonial society since Budi Utomo and Sarekat Islam had stepped up their political activity. Urban, literate Indonesians were becoming politically conscious and in the process more self-assertive as they searched for a national cultural and political identity. In the face of this, Europeans were becoming increasingly uneasy as their comfortable privileged world was being challenged, and they reacted by becoming even more conscious of their 'European-ness'. The emergence of the racial issue in the VSTP paralleled the changes in the political sphere where multiracial parties such as the Indische Partij and Insulinde, advocates of racial cooperation and associationism, were giving way to the more exclusivist nationalism of Sarekat Islam.

The air of superiority from some Europeans within the VSTP

was increasingly resented by Indonesian members. At a meeting of Indonesian members of the Semarang branch in January 1915, complaints were voiced about Europeans of equal or lower rank demanding subservience from Indonesians within the union. One Indonesian member argued: 'We are eager for cooperation of the races within the organization, but this entails ending the haughty attitude of commissioners and others who want us to crawl to them'.[57]

The prominent European socialist members of the VSTP, Sneevliet and Dekker, deeply regretted the trend towards racial polarization in the political sphere spilling over into labour unions. Sneevliet acknowledged that, in general, where Europeans in the Indies had joined unions they had done so in racially separate ones, and where unions were not divided on race, as in the VSTP, Europeans were increasingly uneasy about the growth in Indonesian membership. Nevertheless, he asserted, whereas in some industries it could be argued that the interests of Europeans and Indonesians were very different, in the railways and tramways they were identical:

> Certainly, it is understandable that among the lower level European rail and tramway workers fears still exist: the native workers are advancing, the native workers continue to move towards equality, our children will have a much more difficult struggle for survival in the future than we can possibly foretell. Those who reason this way are inclined to oppose the pressure from native workers in order to weaken it. But anybody who reflects on this will see that these efforts are mistaken and that all they will achieve is a hostile reaction from the advancing native workers which can only be a great disadvantage for the numerically so much weaker European element. The more forward-looking people will understand that the interests of the lower personnel demand that everything be done to prevent the emergence of such a hostile reaction. For this reason, then, support for the natives from the European side is absolutely essential. For this purpose, cooperation in one union is necessary.[58]

Semaun returned to a discussion of the racial question in August 1918 when he argued that although as a social democrat he acknowledged one indivisible working class, nevertheless he could not ignore the difference between the middle class proletariat and the real proletariat. This difference existed in all societies but was sharper in a colonial society where the racial division was so rigid. In his article, and in an article published in *Si Tetap* the previous

month, Semaun was particularly critical of Insulinde, which he saw as dangerous for the true interests of the proletariat because it talked of promoting the 'general interest'. The 'general interest', he asserted, may not always be the interest of the proletariat.[59]

These articles were the catalyst for a special meeting of a number of European members in Solo in August 1918 which led to the formation of a new railway union for Europeans only, the *Spoorbond*.[60] The exodus of European members from the VSTP increased rapidly, influenced not only by the alternative of the *Spoorbond* but also by their discomfort as the VSTP became more assertive, threatening to use its industrial muscle against the railway companies. By 1920, out of a total VSTP membership of 6,494, there were only 236 Europeans, most of whom were lower-level employees who presumably felt that the VSTP would serve their interests better than the European railway union, which spoke mainly for high-level personnel.[61]

In September 1914 the colonial government had laid the legal basis for the army to keep the railways running. At the same time it acknowledged privately that there was room for improvements in wages and conditions in the railway industry. In September 1914 the Director of Government Industries informed the private railway companies that he had begun an inquiry into conditions in the industry and would shortly submit recommendations to the Governor-General for changes to the Railway and Tramway Regulations under which both the State Railways and private companies operated. The intention was to try to undercut potential support for the VSTP by redressing some of the workers' grievances.[62]

Meanwhile, the VSTP had begun its own review of wages and conditions: it was not simply coincidental that the government's review began at the same time. When published early in 1915, copies were sent to all railway companies, the State Railways, the Director of Government Industries and the Governor-General. The formal announcement by the Minister of Colonies in the Upper House of the States General in February 1916 that the Indies government was reviewing the Railway and Tramway Regulations was seen by the VSTP executive as a just reward for its labours. In October 1916 the law was altered so that, in future, regulations on working hours, conditions and rest periods were to be determined by consultation between the Director of Government Industries and company managements. Where agreement

could not be reached then the Governor-General would make the final decision.[63] As conditions in the State Railways were generally superior to those in private companies, the VSTP hoped this would lead to considerable improvements for railway workers.

In October 1914 the VSTP began a comprehensive inquiry into working conditions and rest times of railway and tramway workers in the major companies in Java. Survey sheets were distributed to all VSTP members with the request that they not only fill them in personally but also assist others in their workplaces, particularly the illiterate, to complete them. The intention was to get as accurate a picture as possible of the hours of work, conditions, meal breaks, rest periods and wages of railway workers in a two-week period between 1 and 14 October 1914. The completed report became the basis on which the VSTP formulated its demand for improved wages and conditions in future years.

While VSTP leaders experienced a greater willingness by the State Railways management to meet with them to discuss problems, at the same time the State Railways was trying to counter the growth of the union. In 1912 it established a system of group representatives whereby Indonesian employees in workshops or regions elected a representative each year who was expected to channel grievances to management and with whom it was prepared to discuss grievances and review wages and conditions.[64] The scheme was not successful, largely because managements manoeuvred the election of older, trusted workers, often from a lesser *priyayi* background, who had long since lost any power they might have had among their fellow workers. The VSTP had recruited many of the more influential workers, who were therefore unacceptable to State Railways management. In some years the State Railways had difficulty finding candidates and those it did find increasingly could not compete against VSTP leaders for mass support. The group representative system seems to have been quietly abandoned around 1919.

As Sneevliet and Semaun became major influences in the VSTP and as Indonesians became the overwhelming proportion of members, so the VSTP platform began to reflect the increasing resentment of Indonesian railway workers that Europeans in the industry were so much better treated than them. Local VSTP leaders, themselves generally the better educated, literate and better paid employees, were the most deeply conscious that they were treated less well than Europeans. A small breakthrough was

achieved on 1 April 1916 when the State Railways adopted a policy of paying the same wages and giving the same conditions to Indonesian personnel who had the same qualifications as Europeans in a specific job.[65] Although few Indonesians qualified for the better paid jobs, and discrimination continued in more subtle ways, nevertheless the establishment of a set wage for each job instead of separate Indonesian and European wages was a breakthrough.

The Semarang newspaper, *Locomotief*, generally the most liberal of the Dutch language newspapers in the colony, welcomed the State Railways move but went on to argue that there were different standards of living between Europeans and Indonesians and that for this reason some differences in salary were justified. It also expressed the fear that equal pay for equal work might mitigate against Europeans because employers might be tempted to lower European salaries. Sneevliet retorted that this response was typical of the half-heartedness of the Ethicii who wanted racial discrimination removed, but not too quickly lest it have an adverse impact on Europeans. He agreed, however, that employers might try to shift increased wages for Indonesians to the disadvantage of Europeans, but he argued that the counter to this was for Europeans to join the VSTP. He feared that exclusively European unions would side with employers against Indonesians and saw that it was in employers' interests to drive a wedge between European and Indonesian employees.[66] His fears were realized during the 1923 strike.

The State Railways' reform was not followed by the private railway companies and did nothing to remedy the feelings of injustice among many Indonesians that they were not only badly paid and hard worked but also had to put up with poor housing and living conditions. A State Railways worker in Batavia complained in 1916 about the conditions in one of the State Railways kampungs. Conditions were so bad, he claimed, that workers did not want to be transferred to Batavia. The kampung was not only unhealthy, wracked by malaria because it was built on the swampy side of town, but the State Railways' doctor was so far away that Indonesians could not afford to go to him when they were sick, thereby suffering fines or loss of wages because they did not have the required doctor's certificate.[67] A stoker working with the SCS in Pekalongan in 1916 wrote to the *Volharding*, stating that he had decided to give up his job:

I was a cleaner, but later was promoted to apprentice stoker. As an apprentice stoker I had to work much harder than I did as a cleaner in the sheds. For this harder work I received no wage increase, so I could not eat better. Sometimes I worked until 8 or 9 at night without receiving overtime payment. The service regulations are in practice not adhered to, as we must work harder. Oh, my heart was full of grief. Finally, I could no longer put up with this. I therefore asked to leave and I am now unemployed and at my wit's end. I did not know what to do and now I do not care what I do or what becomes of me and my family.[68]

GROWTH OF UNIONS

THE VSTP had evolved from a predominantly European union to one in which by 1918 almost all members were Indonesians. In two other unions established by Europeans, the *Bond van Pandhuis Personeel*, established in 1913 for pawnshop workers, and the *Postbond*, established in 1912 for workers in the post and telegraph service, Indonesian members broke away in 1916 to form their own unions. About 300 Indonesian workers in the pawnshops were members of the *Pandhuisbond* in 1916, but they had no voting rights and therefore no power within the organization.[69] The changes in political and social consciousness that were occurring in the 1910s together with the *Pandhuisbond's* concern primarily with European interests, convinced many Indonesian members to form the *Perserikatan Pegawai Pegadaian Bumiputra* (Native Pawnshop Workers Union — PPPB). Its initiators were Sarekat Islam members and from the beginning it was closely connected to Central Sarekat Islam leaders in Yogyakarta, with Abdul Muis, Tjokroaminoto and Haji Agus Salim key leaders.

By the beginning of 1918 the PPPB had about 2,700 members, out of a total Indonesian workforce in the pawnshops of a little over 6,000.[70] Its growth in two years was remarkable: by 1918 a higher proportion of workers in the Pawnshop Service were unionized than in any other industry in the colony. Most of its members were lower level workers — clerks, bookkeepers or general assistants in the main — but there was also a small number of better paid workers who had advanced to the rank of valuer or even deputy manager and had deserted the *Pandhuisbond*. Despite the presence of a minority of higher paid middle level managers, PPPB leaders saw themselves as primarily representing the interests of ordinary pawnshop workers. This policy was to

lead many of the higher level Indonesian workers to break away from the PPPB in 1921 in order to form their own union.

The PPPB's growth reflected the very high proportion of literate workers employed in the pawnshops, a proportion only exceeded in the teaching service and in the colonial bureaucracy itself. It was much easier to organize among workers who read the nationalist press and were often active members of Sarekat Islam or Budi Utomo. This growth also reflected mounting discontent among Indonesian workers in the pawnshops. In part, this was related to the general economic and social conditions in the Indies, but in part also to the significant changes taking place in the career prospects of native workers. The first pawnshops had been established in 1901 as part of the government's effort to provide an alternative to exploitative, largely Chinese, moneylenders for peasants and urban workers. Jobs in the Pawnshop Service were highly prized by upwardly mobile graduates of the Second Class Native Schools. The work was congenial and, for people who were literate and numerate but otherwise possessed few skills or social standing, of higher status than alternative employment in industry or commerce. Until around 1914 promotion was rapid for young recruits because of a steady expansion in the number of pawnshops. A young Javanese who joined as a base level assistant could expect to become a chief valuer within six to eight years, earning the relatively good salary of f50 per month. However after 1914 very few new pawnshops were opened, reflecting the saturation coverage that had been achieved in Java, and promotion opportunities for young recruits were considerably reduced. Frustrated by the poor prospects for career advancement, many young pawnshop workers became increasingly dissatisfied with their lot.

Dissatisfaction was intensified by wage rates essentially unchanged since 1906. This may have mattered little if a worker could still look forward to rapid and virtually automatic promotion to the f50 a month of Chief Valuer. But in 1918 it was estimated that a worker who joined in 1912 would, seven years later, still be earning only f25 a month and would have to wait many more years before advancing to f30 a month. Those who joined in January 1916 could not expect to earn f30 a month until 1930.[71] Not surprisingly then it was the younger, lower level workers who were the most discontented and it was these people who provided most of the PPPB branch leadership and the overwhelming majority of

active members. By 1918 there was a branch of the PPPB at almost every pawnshop in Java.

Indonesian postal workers also became disenchanted with their European dominated union, the *Postbond*, which in 1916 had a membership of about 1,000.[72] In that year about 100 broke away to form the *Kerukunan Pegawai Post Bumiputra* (KPPB), based in Bandung with a branch in Surabaya.[73] In its initial years the KPPB was not a strong union, reflected in its having only two branches until it began a recruitment drive in 1918. The recruitment drive was successful, and at the end of 1918 it had about 600 members in eight branches (although only about half paid their dues that year), published a twice-monthly journal and had both a savings fund and death benefits fund for members.[74] Unlike in the pawnshops, where most Indonesian members left the *Pandhuisbond* once the PPPB was established, many Indonesian postal workers retained their membership of the *Postbond*, making it more difficult for the KPPB to expand. The presence of Indonesians on the *Postbond* central and branch executives gave many of the better paid Indonesian postal workers a sense of belonging to the union that their counterparts in the pawnshops did not have. The situation was to change in 1919 when the impact of inflation left Indonesian workers' wages well behind those of Europeans and when the changing political climate accelerated the polarization of workers along racial lines.

Other unions were created for the more skilled workers in government employ, including the *Burgerlijke Openbare Werken in Nederlandsch Indie* (BOWNI — for supervisers and higher level workers in the Public Works Department), founded in 1912, and the *Douanabond* (Customs Officers Union), founded in 1911.[75] Both were essentially European unions and from them emerged their Indonesian counterparts, the *Vereeniging Inlandsch Personeel Burgerlijke Openbare Werken* (Union of Native Public Works Employees — VIPBOW) in 1917 and the *Pegawai Bumiputra Pabean Hindia Belanda* (Union of Native Customs Officers in the Netherlands Indies) in 1918. The largest of the Indonesian unions was the *Perserikatan Guru-Guru Hindia Belanda* (PGHB — Association of Teachers in the Netherlands Indies), founded in 1912, which catered for teachers in the rapidly expanding government education system.[76] As early as 1913 it had 1,421 members in twenty branches throughout Java.[77] It saw itself largely as a

professional association, devoting most of its time to discussion of educational proposals and theories, but it did in a quiet way represent the material interests of teachers to the government. By the middle of 1918, though, a schism was becoming apparent within the PGHB, with the lower paid assistant teachers accusing the union of promoting the interests of the better qualified teachers only. The pressure of post-war inflation forced the PGHB into more of an industrial role but also led to sharp internal divisions, with different levels of teachers seeking to defend their own interests through separate organizations.

With the exception of the VSTP, all of these unions catered for government employees only. Most Western-educated Indonesians were employed by government departments and it was these people who were first affected by the changing political and social consciousness in the colony. They were the elite of the Indonesian workforce, much easier to organize than workers in private employment, very conscious of their status and quick to compare their living standards with those of the Europeans with whom they worked. Union activities were generally restrained, respectfully representing members' interests to the government and promoting discussion of technical and professional issues in their congresses and their journals. While growing discontent was apparent among pawnshop workers, postal workers and other groups of government employees, it was confined to grumblings in the press and motions at annual meetings.

Workers in private industry were not yet organized into labour unions, though the regular outbreak of small-scale strikes indicates that they were far from passive tools of employers. They were, however, much harder to organize than workers in government employ because they were dispersed through hundreds of small companies each with its own set of wages and conditions and, equally importantly, each with its individual patronage bonds. Whereas the leadership for unions of government employees came largely from within, supported by local and 'national' leaders of Sarekat Islam, if workers in the scattered private industries were to be unionized then the leadership had to come from outside. Involvement with government employees provided the experience for Sarekat Islam leaders to expand their horizons from 1917 and make concerted efforts to organize the wider urban workforce.

1. The material for this paragraph is taken from the archives of the East Java Steamtram Company, Dossier 745, 'Werkstakingen 1913–1926'.
2. *Locomotief*, 4 January 1913.
3. See R. Kumar, 'The Bombay Textile Strike, 1919', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 8,1 (1971), pp. 1-29.
4. See, for example, *Kaoem Moeda*, 8 March 1919, in *IPO* 10 (1919), p. 14.
5. *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 20 and 24 February 1913.
6. *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 22, 26 and 27 February 1913.
7. *Locomotief*, 11 June 1913.
8. 'Pikiran jang waras', *Oetoesan Hindia*, 1 March 1913, quoted in *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 23 April 1913.
9. Cited in, *Locomotief*, 24 February 1913.
10. *Locomotief*, 18 March 1913.
11. *Locomotief*, 8, 9, 10 and 14 May 1913.
12. *Locomotief*, 9 May 1913.
13. *Locomotief*, 14 May 1913.
14. For a discussion of this strike in the Semarang harbour see J. Ingleson, 'Life and Work in Colonial Cities: Harbour Workers in Java in the 1910s and 1920s', *Modern Asian Studies* 17, 3 (1983), pp. 455-76.
15. Archives of the East Java Steamtram Company, Dossier 745, 'Werkstakingen, 1913–1926'.
16. *Nieuwe Soerabaia Courant*, 16 October 1913.
17. *Locomotief*, 7 and 10 April 1913.
18. *Locomotief*, 25 April 1913.
19. *Locomotief*, 24 February 1913.
20. Cited in Korver, op. cit., p. 24.
21. Ibid.
22. Chief Representative, Sister Societies, to Commandant of the 2nd Military Division on Java, 5 July 1913, Sister Societies Common Archives, Dossier 745-b.
23. Chief Representative, Sister Societies to Directors, 18 July 1913, Sister Societies Common Archives, Dossier 745-b.
24. Ordinance of 14 September 1914, Staatsblad 1914, No 614. See also, Chief Representative Sister Societies to Directors, 13 October 1914, Sister Societies Common Archives, Dossier 745-b.
25. *Locomotief*, 14 August 1914.
26. *Locomotief*, 5 June 1913.
27. *Locomotief*, 16 and 19 August 1913.
28. *Locomotief*, 16 September 1913.
29. *Soewara SS Bond*, 8 July 1910.
30. *Soewara SS Bond*, 8 September 1910.
31. *Locomotief*, 16 November 1908.
32. *Soewara SS Bond*, 22 March 1911 and H. Sneevliet, *Tien Jaren VSTP* (Semarang, 1919), pp. 1-5.
33. *Spoorbondsblad*, 1 December 1923.
34. Sneevliet, op. cit., p. 6.
35. For discussion of Sneevliet's involvement in labour unions and politics, see McVey, op. cit., pp. 12-14 and M. Perthus, *Henk Sneevliet: revolutionair*

socialist in Europa en Azie (Nijmegen, 1976), esp. pp. 89-97. See also D.M.G. Koch, *Batig Slot. Figuren uit het oude Indie* (Amsterdam, 1960), pp. 110-18, for a portrait of Sneevliet by one of his contemporaries. McVey, op. cit., is the standard work on Dutch socialists' involvement in political and labour union activities in Java.

36. For a discussion of Sarekat Islam, the ISDV and the formation of the PKI, see, McVey, op. cit.
37. See, for example, Perthus, op. cit., p. 67.
38. *Volharding*, 30 July 1914.
39. *Volharding*, 22 March 1915.
40. *Volharding*, 31 December 1914.
41. *Volharding*, 22 January 1915.
42. *Volharding*, 22 January 1915.
43. See Sneevliet's articles in *Volharding*, 22 March 1915 and 20 June 1916.
44. *Volharding*, 22 April 1915 and 5 July 1916.
45. *Volharding*, 10 February 1920.
46. *Si Tetap*, February-March 1926.
47. Sneevliet, op. cit., p. 7.
48. *Volharding*, 7 July 1915.
    Subscriptions were set in 1914 at 1 per cent of monthly salary, with a minimum payment of 25 cents and a maximum payment of f2 per month. Members were also exhorted to contribute 1 per cent of their annual bonuses. *Volharding*, 15 August 1914.
49. *Volharding*, 22 December 1915 and 20 January 1917.
50. At the time of the strike in the Semarang-Cirebon Railway Company in August 1920, Djaid was chairman of the Cirebon branch of the Sarekat Islam, chairman of the Cirebon branch of the VSTP, chairman of the Harbour Workers Union in Cirebon and adviser or officeholder in numerous other local unions. He was described in government reports as being self-employed, presumably making his living from the salaries he received from Sarekat Islam, the VSTP and other unions.
51. *Volharding*, 7 April 1916.
52. See, *Orgaan van de VSTP*, February 1910.
53. *Volharding*, 7 and 22 October 1915, 7 April 1916.
54. *Volharding*, 5 July 1916.
55. *Volharding*, 5 January 1917.
56. *Volharding*, 20 May 1917.
57. *Volharding*, 22 January 1915.
58. 'European workers and trade union organisation', *Volharding*, 20 September 1917.
59. 'The racial difference and the VSTP', *Volharding*, 20 August 1918, and 'Careful. Insulinde wants to break up the VSTP', *Si Tetap*, 15 July 1918, cited in *Volharding*, 20 August 1918.
60. *Volharding*, 20 August 1918.
61. *Volharding*, 10 February 1920.
62. The letter from the Director of Government Industries to the Management Committee of NIS, dated 18 September 1914, was printed in *Volharding*, 30 October 1914.
63. *Volharding*, 20 November 1916.

64. The State Railways reported in 1920 that there had been considerably reduced activity by its Group Representatives during the year, in part because its personnel were turning to the VSTP. See *Verslag der Staatsspoor- en Tramwegen*, op. cit., Part 1.
65. Chief Inspector, Head of State Rail and Tramways in Netherlands Indies to Head Operations SJS, 28 July 1916, Sister Societies Common Archives, Dossier 743.
66. *Locomotief*, 22 January 1915; *Volharding*, 22 February 1915.
67. *Volharding*, 20 August 1916.
68. *Volharding*, 22 July 1916.
69. Comments by Abdul Muis, quoted in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 4 February 1922, Secret Mail Report 1922/212.
70. See, J.J.B. Ostmeier, 'The Pawnshop Service and the Native Strike action', *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned Indie*, 15 February 1919.
71. Ibid.
72. *Het Vrije Woord*, 10 September 1916.
73. *Soeara Postel*, 1 June 1920.
74. *Soeara Postel*, 1 April 1918.
75. *Sinar Djawa*, 9 January 1917.
76. *Sinar Djawa*, 9 January 1917.
77. *Locomotief*, 25 August 1913.

III
Conflict in the Cities

IN the aftermath of the First World War urban workers in many countries were involved in bitter strikes and lock-outs or took to the streets in protest. This was as true in colonial Asia as it was in metropolitan Europe. The economic and political structures of European countries were very different from those of their colonial possessions; consequently the style and intensity of worker militancy differed greatly. Even in the colonies, responses were very different, with great unrest in some and relative tranquillity in others. Urbanization and industrialization were at an earlier stage of development in colonial Indonesia than in India, China or Japan and worker militancy therefore assumed different forms. Whether in Europe or Asia, though, the catalyst for action was the same: sudden and massive inflation at a time of stagnant wages exacerbated workers' sense of injustice.

The central leaders of labour unions and nationalist political parties were well aware that Indonesian workers were not alone in their protest and were heartened by what they saw as a universal conflict between labour and capital. For those who went on strike, however, what mattered was the impact of inflation on their wages and the living conditions of their families and friends. They had little knowledge of, or interest in, what was happening in other countries. They could not read the newspapers which talked of a Bolshevik Revolution in Russia or the struggles of workers in China and Britain, nor did they understand Marxist and socialist ideologies. In this, perhaps, they were not so different from Welsh coalminers or German dockworkers who also took strike action

after the war. Union leaders may have been excited and sustained by the knowledge that they were part of a wider movement, but the vision of ordinary workers was limited by their individual work experiences and the shared life of their communities.

The living conditions of most urban Indonesians declined sharply during and immediately after the war as wages failed to keep pace with huge increases in the cost of living between 1918 and 1920. This overall inflation was compounded by massive rises in the price of rice in 1919 and 1920. The rice price index jumped from 140.5 in 1919 to 228.2 in 1920 (on a base of 100 in 1913) and remained at the high level of 191.6 during 1921.[1] This sudden surge in rice prices had a disastrous impact on urban wage earners who had to buy their rice in the markets and who were already reeling under the impact of post-war inflation. For many decades Java had been dependent on rice imports to feed its expanding population. When crops in the major rice exporting states of Burma and Thailand failed in 1919 and 1920, the shortage of rice in Java became severe, forcing prices to record levels. There was open discontent in rural areas over forced deliveries to the government at considerably less than market prices, discontent which Sarekat Islam and other nationalist parties exploited. This was a major factor in the Section B Affair in 1919, in which Sarekat Islam was implicated in a secret plot to resist the government.[2] Discontent, coupled with a strong sense of injustice about treatment by employers and those in authority, was strongest in the towns and cities. It was expressed in mass protest meetings, in labour militancy and in the expansion of the urban membership of nationalist parties.

The post-war inflation was accompanied by an expansion of the colonial economy. This expansion followed four years of little or no recruitment of young Dutchmen for the colony's industries and at a time when a lack of world shipping in the aftermath of the war meant that it would be some time before they could be recruited in large numbers. There was, therefore, a shortage of skilled labour in the colony between 1918 and 1921, with companies forced to compete for skilled Indonesian workers and with Indonesians promoted to jobs previously predominantly the preserve of Europeans. The impact of the world-wide influenza epidemic, which badly affected Indonesia in the second half of 1918, temporarily reduced the availability of both skilled and unskilled labour even further, with sickness forcing many circular

migrants to stay in their villages instead of making their annual journey to the urban areas in search of work.[3]

Record world prices for sugar, an expanding economy, a shortage of skilled labour and rapid inflation was the basis for urban unrest. Grievances had been accumulating for many years among the urban workforce: the sudden erosion of living standards between 1918 and 1920 transformed these grievances into social and industrial protest. Some were organized strikes, but most were spontaneous reactions by workers to their deteriorating conditions at a time when they were well aware that the economy was booming.

EXPANSION OF UNIONS

SAREKAT Islam is usually portrayed as a rural organisation in the 1910s. While it did enrol many thousands of peasants, especially in its formative years to 1916, after 1916 most of its members probably lived and worked in small towns or in the kampungs of the major cities. Even in the early years, almost all branches were located in towns and cities and local leadership was usually in the hands of urban people. It was from these urban bases that Sarekat Islam propagandists moved into the surrounding villages. After flirting with the idea of creating a large rural following, from 1916 Sarekat Islam leaders realized that a more dependable membership would be found in the towns and cities.[4] Provision of welfare services, promotion of self-help and self-esteem through nationalist propaganda, and local leaders' readiness to take up ordinary people's grievances with government officials, employers or landlords, resulted in rapid urban growth. As more and more members looked to local Sarekat Islam leaders for assistance during disputes at work, the party was drawn into formalizing its involvement with urban workers.

In 1917 Sarekat Islam branches in the major cities of Semarang, Surabaya, Yogyakarta and Batavia established workers' departments and began to organize the urban workforce. Two categories of membership were created: regular membership and membership of 'workers' groups'. The Semarang branch was the most active in this area, due largely to the efforts of Semaun, who quickly asserted his leadership. He was supported by other young Indonesians who like himself had come under the influence of the Dutch socialists in the Semarang-based ISDV. They were later to

become the core of the PKI on its formation in Semarang in 1920, but for the moment the economic conditions gave them an opportunity to put their Marxist-Leninist ideas into practice by using Sarekat Islam as a vehicle for organizing urban workers.

Workers' groups operated under the control of Sarekat Islam branch executives, though the intention was eventually to separate them organizationally. Initially, membership of Sarekat Islam-sponsored unions was restricted to Indonesians, but in 1919 all workers were allowed to join, provided they earned less than f150 per month. The earlier regulation effectively barred Chinese workers from membership, which only made it easier for employers to use Chinese as strike breakers. Sarekat Islam union leaders hoped that if they could incorporate Chinese workers into labour unions, employers would find it more difficult to play one racial group off against another. In this they were unsuccessful. Few Chinese workers joined Sarekat Islam-sponsored unions — or any other Indonesian unions — which was indicative of the strong racial barriers between Chinese and Indonesians in the workplaces as well as in the kampungs. When strikes did occur, Chinese workers usually stayed on the job and others were often recruited as strike breakers.

The growth of unions among privately employed workers was noticeably strongest in those industries which had relatively large numbers of skilled workers, particularly in the engineering, printing and railway industries. Skilled workers were more politically conscious than the majority of day-wage labourers, and the acute skilled labour shortage after the war made them more aware of their bargaining power with employers. Branch executives of the new labour unions were dominated by skilled artisans and white collar workers, especially by clerks, foremen and supervisors, most of whom would have been literate. Their powerful patronage links enabled them to bring unskilled workers into the unions and when disputes arose persuade them to strike.

In a colonial society unionization of workers was a highly political activity. It challenged the interests of capital directly, by threatening the supply of cheap labour. As well it struck at the core of colonial society, the legitimacy of which was based on a caste-like division between European masters and native servants. The speeches and writings of 'national' and local union leaders were as full of fiery denunciations of capitalism as they were of condemnations of colonialism. Most Sarekat Islam leaders

distinguished between foreign capitalism, which was sinful, and indigenous capitalism, which might be acceptable, but Semaun, along with others who joined the PKI after its formation in 1920, vehemently denounced capitalism in all its forms.[5] In the eyes of government and management, by organizing workers to demand their 'rights' and by creating structures linking workplaces and urban intellectuals, labour unions challenged colonial rule itself. Although almost all strikes continued to have deep-seated economic causes and were mostly eruptions from below, the European community, whether government officials, company managers or leaders of European labour unions, in the end saw them as political actions instigated by outside agitators.

Sarekat Islam, and later PKI, leaders were well aware that the workplaces were their most important points of contact with an urban constituency. Semaun's work in Semarang and among railway and printing industry workers, the work of Sosrokardono, Abdul Muis and Agus Salim with pawnshop workers and Surjopranoto's involvement with sugar factory workers all reflected this. In September 1918 the Sarekat Islam established a Commission for Workers Action, consisting of Semaun and Sosrokardono (its secretary), to report on ways in which the party could deepen its involvement with urban workers. Its report reflected Semaun's thinking on two basic issues: the role of strikes and the need for a labour federation. It argued that strikes should only occur in extreme cases, and that a general strike could only be successful if organized by a Java-wide labour union federation. Although unstated, Semaun was actively involved at the time in trying to persuade the major unions that such a federation was essential for the further development of the labour movement.

The third congress of Sarekat Islam in October 1918 expressed its support for '. . . orderly strikes by the workers to improve their conditions, to realize justice and to fight arbitrary measures'[6] and adopted a minimum programme for workers. This included: wages to keep pace with the cost of living; equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex; an 8 hour day; one day per week free and two weeks paid holiday each year; sickness insurance; a pension fund; a ban on child labour and a ban on night work for women; a ban on women in advanced stages of pregnancy or young mothers working, with full wages paid to them; free medical care; full sickness pay; a ban on employers imposing fines; abolition of all restrictions on association by workers; the establishment

of a Conciliation Court and the establishment of a Labour Office.[7]

This programme reflected Indonesian union leaders' intellectual basis in European socialist and labour movement thinking. Over the next few years they drew on it in their defence of workers against management and government. Its full implementation would have truly revolutionized the factories and workplaces in the colony and neither Semaun nor any other union leader expected this to be achieved. Some of the demands were yet to be achieved by workers in Western societies, others reflected concerns also expressed by the colonial government as it tentatively moved towards regulating the expanding modern sector of the economy. While the government hesitated, and finally compromised with the interests of capital, Indonesian union leaders channelled workers' hitherto largely unorganized grievances into coherent action.

THE COST-OF-LIVING CAMPAIGN

THE accelerating inflation focussed labour leaders' attention on gaining cost-of-living allowances for their members. In order to head off potential unrest, some of the large private companies began to pay cost-of-living allowances from January 1916 and by the end of 1917 many others had followed their lead, in most cases paying a 20 per cent allowance. Other industries were reluctant to pay out more than they were absolutely forced to. Foremost among these was the railway industry.

The VSTP estimated in December 1916 that the overall cost of living in the major Javanese cities had increased by at least 20 per cent since August 1914, with no compensating increase in wages for railway workers. In October 1916 it prepared a lengthy submission for the Sister Societies, including a petition signed by 411 European and 1,352 Indonesian workers, in support of its claim for a general wage rise. The Chief Representative of the Sister Societies rejected it, but conceded that the VSTP's figures were accurate. He acknowledged that there was a good case for a temporary cost-of-living allowance of around 10 per cent, but, because of the cost involved and the difficulty of ending payments once begun, recommended his Directors against it.[8]

The VSTP now put additional pressure on the private railway companies and the State Railways. On 17 April 1917 it organized a public meeting at Yogyakarta at which 300 delegates from branches

all over Java brought petitions signed by 4,065 VSTP members and 6,165 non-members. That it could organize so many railway workers to sign a petition was a tribute to the rapid development of the VSTP and to its leaders' understanding of the issues that moved them. The meeting demanded a cost-of-living allowance backdated to 1 January. Moreover, reflecting VSTP leaders' concern for reducing wage differentials in the industry, it demanded a graduated allowance, ranging from 10 per cent for the highest paid workers to 50 per cent for those on the lowest wages and those with families to support.

The VSTP's carefully prepared case was this time effective, in part because the Sister Societies realized that if other industries were paying such allowances they could not hold out very long, but in part also because the company was concerned about the growing strength of the VSTP and its veiled threat of direct action. The Sister Societies agreed to pay a cost-of-living allowance to all employees from 1 July 1917 to 30 June 1918. For those earning less than f200 per month a bonus of one month's salary, for those earning f200 and f350 per month a bonus of f200.[9] The allowances were divided among employees a good deal less equitably than the VSTP had requested and the Company had carefully described the payment as a once-only bonus. Nevertheless, the VSTP had achieved a major breakthrough.

The State Railways, however, had to await a determination for all government employees. The government's reluctance to give its workers what most private companies had conceded by the middle of 1917 forced the VSTP to join forces with other unions of government employees in a show of solidarity. It organized a meeting in Yogyakarta on 2 February 1918 in order to discuss joint action.[10] Most labour leaders present represented Indonesian workers but some represented predominantly European workers. The latter were ambivalent in their support for the cost-of-living allowance campaign. On the one hand, they had seen the living standards of their own members decline in recent years and saw advantages for themselves in getting behind the vociferous campaign of Indonesian unions. On the other hand, they were the beneficiaries of huge wage differentials between Europeans and Indonesians and there was no question of them willingly giving up this privilege.

The Yogyakarta meeting established a cost-of-living commission, drew up a petition to send to the Governor-General and

decided to organize a public campaign throughout Java. Over the next three months public meetings were held in all major Javanese cities, at which labour union and nationalist leaders addressed large crowds on the injustice of the government's position and the need for workers to organize themselves in order to fight for their rights. The meeting in Semarang on 12 February was typical. Organized by the local Sarekat Islam branch and held in the central city park, it attracted about 3,000 people to hear Semaun and others speak on the impact of inflation on ordinary workers. According to police reports, most of those present came from the lower layers of Semarang society — domestic servants, cabmen and labourers — people who would not themselves benefit from allowances for government workers but who were deeply affected by the post-war inflation. The meeting passed a resolution protesting against the high price of rice, asking the government to fix a maximum rice price and demanding reductions in the area of land given over to the production of export crops in favour of an expansion of rice growing.[11]

In May 1918 the government finally conceded that in the light of undeniable increases in the cost of living and the widespread introduction of cost-of-living allowances by private industry, it could no longer deny a cost-of-living allowance to its own employees. An allowance was introduced, ranging from 20 per cent of monthly wages for those on the lowest rates to 10 per cent for those on the highest. The VSTP leadership was quick to claim credit for forcing the government's hand, trumpeting that it demonstrated clearly the benefit of labour union action. All members were urged to redouble their activities on behalf of the VSTP and to contribute towards a fighting fund which would support members if they were forced to strike.[12]

STRIKES

DESPITE the widespread introduction of cost-of-living allowances, the general rice shortage and its high price, together with the rise in almost all items of day-to-day living caused a spate of strikes in 1918 and 1919. The strikes were noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, while occurring in all major Javanese cities, they were concentrated in Semarang. Secondly, without exception they were spontaneous walk-outs by workers and only after the event were labour unions or political parties involved. The Acting Head of the

Political Intelligence Service, Muurling, prepared a generally sensitive report on the strikes but had difficulty in accounting for their concentration in Semarang and almost total absence in Surabaya. In the end, he argued that the native population in Surabaya was more prosperous than that in Semarang and that because of its more diverse industrial base Surabaya was less affected by the adverse economic conditions than Semarang, which relied on external trade for its wealth.[13]

While there was some truth in Muurling's argument, it ignored other equally important factors. The level of protest in urban areas is not only an indication of the depth of discontent among the workforce but also a reflection of the development of self and group consciousness among workers and the strength of local leadership. The Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam, led by Semaun and supported by the ISDV, was active much earlier than its Surabaya counterpart in organizing urban workers into labour unions and channelling their discontent into formulated demands on employers. Through its frequent meetings and through its daily newspaper *Sinar Djawa* (renamed *Sinar Hindia* in 1918), which was predominantly circulated in Semarang, the Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam raised the level of social and political awareness of a wider spectrum of urban people than any other branch. Largely due to the work of men such as Semaun, Bergsma and Kadarisman, the core of the VSTP's central executive, since 1914 a small but growing section of Semarang workers were becoming more aware that it was possible to force improved wages and conditions from employers.

One of the earliest major strikes in 1918 was in a furniture factory in Semarang. On 4 February, forty french polishers went on strike after fifteen of their fellow workers had been made redundant. In what was to become a common pattern, it was the most skilled and better paid workers who began the strike. After walking out they immediately sought assistance from the local Sarekat Islam executive. Semaun and Kadarisman, chairman and secretary respectively of the Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam, listened to the striking workers and organized their grievances into a clear set of demands. On 6 February Sarekat Islam proclaimed a general strike at the furniture factory, calling on all Sarekat Islam members there to cease work until the executive called off the strike. From the factory owner they demanded a reduction in the length of the working day, reinstatement of the fifteen dismissed

workers — or alternatively payment to them of three months' wages — and the payment of full wages for the time workers were on strike. The strike call was successful, with an almost total withdrawal of labour. By 14 February the owners had caved in and agreed to all demands, including the reinstatement of the fifteen french polishers.[14]

Strikes also occurred in the first few months of 1918 in a cement and tile factory, a cigar factory, a number of printing companies and on the docks. All were spontaneous walk-outs by workers aggrieved over employers' refusal to pay increased wages or over their unfair treatment of them. In most cases foremen either led the striking workers or tacitly supported them, but on a few occasions actions of the foremen themselves caused disputes: a reminder of their dual role in the workplaces. In the cigar factory, for example, workers walked out early in March after a foreman had refused to allow one of them into the factory because he had forgotten to bring his work card with him. The workers were regular employees but were paid indirectly on a daily basis by the foreman. The Sarekat Islam executive took up the workers' cause by circulating a handbill urging nobody to work at the factory during the strike and demanding the removal of the foreman together with payment of workers' lost wages. After a little more than a week the Chinese owner accepted these demands, dismissed the foreman and paid f300 to strikers in lieu of wages lost.[15]

Semarang workers had good reason to be buoyed by the general success of their militancy at the beginning of 1918. After a successful strike in the printing company that published the Dutch language newspaper *De Indier,* Sarekat Islam circulated handbills among printing workers boldly headed 'We have won.'[16] However, a strike in the *Nieuwe Courant* in April 1918 was a salutary reminder of the fragility of the labour movement. On 10 April compositors and printers at the newspaper walked out after one of their number had been sent home by the company. A day or two earlier workers had discussed their grievances with Sarekat Islam leaders and talked of going on strike. Semaun had urged them to put their grievances in writing first, after which he would take them up with the company. His caution was understandable, given the weakness of organized labour, but the printing workers were in no mood to be patient. The nationalist propaganda of recent years, the obvious success of strikes elsewhere in Semarang and

the pressure of inflation on their daily lives made them determined to take the matter into their own hands. After their spontaneous action on 10 April, the seventy-six strikers, from a total workforce of eighty, immediately went to Semaun who now agreed to take up their case with the *Nieuwe Courant* management. On arrival at the newspaper office he found the doors locked and the remaining four workers also on strike. Semaun later argued, with some justification, that if the editor of the *Nieuwe Courant,* his long-standing Dutch socialist friend D.M.G. Koch, had spoken to him that morning then he would have been able to persuade the workers to go back to work immediately. As it was, Koch's refusal to recognize Sarekat Islam as the representative of his workers made the men more determined than ever to stay on strike. Given his socialist convictions it is difficult to see how Koch rationalized his actions.

The *Nieuwe Courant* was kept in production, albeit in a reduced format, by the use of eight strike breakers from outside Semarang. They were housed by Koch in his own home, under police protection. This was short lived, as within two days all of them also refused to work. Apparently they had agreed to come to Semarang without realizing that there was a strike at the printery. After becoming aware of the situation and after threats from the strikers they decided not to undermine their fellow workers. They were replaced by imported Chinese workers who apparently had no such scruples. The newspaper continued to appear, though those who delivered it on foot or by bicycle to subscribers in Semarang were heckled and harrassed by some of the strikers.[17]

The strike continued into the middle of June, with Koch refusing to meet his workers' demands. Strikers were predominantly the skilled workers, with most of the unskilled workers, including the delivery men, staying on the job. They were supported by Sarekat Islam, which raised f400 and contributed another f500 from its own funds. This was nowhere near enough, though, and as the strike lengthened, payments to strikers were reduced to one-third of normal wages for unmarried men and one-half for married men, with an additional contribution of 50 cents a week for each child or dependent parent. By the middle of June the strike was over, more than two months after it had begun, with the *Nieuwe Courant* offering improved wages and conditions but not meeting the other demands.[18]

The *Nieuwe Courant* had countered the strike by recruiting

Chinese workers. This so incensed Darsono, a young and outspoken Sarekat Islam leader in Semarang who was later to become a prominent leader of the PKI, that he publicly attacked the Chinese for 'behaving like cowards' and causing the strike to fail.[19] Others before had complained about employers' use of Chinese as strike breakers, but Darsono's attack on the Chinese themselves was the strongest yet made by a prominent nationalist. The long-standing strained relations between Chinese and Indonesians were exacerbated by differential wages and by the willingness of many skilled and unskilled Chinese workers to take over strikers' jobs. The colony's major Malay language Chinese newspaper, *Sin Po*, later responded to Darsono's criticism by accepting that what the Chinese workers had done was wrong, but arguing that the problem was the absence of labour unions in the colony which cut across ethnic lines. Chinese workers, it argued, were just as strongly opposed to capitalists as natives, and it urged the formation of labour unions which would accept Chinese as members.[20] Unstated was the deep-seated racial antagonism towards Chinese in the colony which made it difficult for Chinese urban workers to feel any solidarity with their ethnic Indonesian fellow workers. This lack of solidarity was openly exploited by employers.

Semaun was clearly in agreement with the argument of *Sin Po* and was further convinced that the only way printing workers could improve their lot was by the creation of a Java-wide printing workers' union. There were at the time a number of small, largely ineffective unions for printing workers in the major cities on Java. The major printing companies had branches in two or more cities and only a well-organized Java-wide union might be able to prevent a strike-bound branch bringing labour from another city or transferring work to another branch. Around 150 Semarang printing workers attended a public meeting on 26 May at which Semaun and Sneevliet urged the creation of a printing workers' union. Semaun argued for a union totally separate from Sarekat Islam so that it could more readily recruit other printing unions in Java into a federation. Sneevliet, a long-time advocate of multiracial, class-based unions, focused on the use of Chinese as strike breakers by the *Nieuwe Courant*, pointing out that it was not possible for Chinese to join a union directly linked to Sarekat Islam, because the statutes of Sarekat Islam restricted membership to Indonesians only. Moreover, a totally separate organization, argued Sneevliet, would gain far more support because it would be

solely concerned with industrial issues and would be able to create a strike fund. Whether those in attendance understood these arguments is open to question, but they did authorize Semaun and Sneevliet to organize a printing workers' union. On 23 June the *Inlandsche Zettersbond* (Native Printers Union) was launched in Semarang, with Semaun announcing that a conference of all printing unions throughout Java would be organized later in the year.[21] Nothing more was heard of this proposal, probably because Semaun was fully occupied in the last half of 1918 in trying to form a labour union federation. A Java-wide printing workers' union had to wait until major strikes in the industry in 1920 drove him to revive the idea.

In contrast to the general pattern of skilled workers being the most strident in defence of their living standards, on 5 November some 1,500 labourers working for the Semarang Steam and Sail Boat Company went on strike.[22] When the strike ended nineteen days later it had become the longest strike yet experienced in Semarang. The Semarang seamen gained some improvements though not as many as they wanted. They remained low paid workers, even by the sparse standards of the time. The strike had surprised Sarekat Islam leaders in Semarang as much as it had the company management. While its propaganda would have percolated into harbour workers' kampungs and contributed to workers' determination to force improvements in their economic lot, it had not tried to organize among these men. Indeed, Sarekat Islam leaders were uncertain as to how they could organize among circular migrants who, although wage labourers, retained strong connections with their villages and for the most part lived in the villages as much as in the cities. A year or so later Sarekat Islam and the PKI both made tentative moves into harbour workers' communities but never with the same confidence, or success, as when organizing among other groups of urban workers.[23]

PAWNSHOP WORKERS

THE Native Pawnshop Workers Union (PPPB) flourished in the immediate post-war years, drawing its strongest support from younger workers. Pawnshop workers saw the union not only as a body which might get them better wages, but also as a public outlet for their frustrations at a system which was not living up to their expectations. A chief valuer wrote to his manager in late 1918 or

early 1919, making clear the pressure on older workers to support the young activists:

> As chief valuer, I now have f50, which is not much, but I can live on it. I have a good pawnshop and . . . a good boss, but I cannot let my children go to the school here in the village. Certainly, I would like to have a higher wage, for I could then send my eldest child . . . to attend the HIS [the Dutch-language schools for Indonesians] and pay the board. I and all the older workers here do not want to strike. Those who do are only the 'young boys' who earn f25 — who have nothing to lose because they are still young. However, I will have to join in, for just as the flood washes away the coconut tree as well as the bush, so shall we be carried along because otherwise we will not be able to live in the kampungs. Even if one puts six soldiers in front of our doors, the bad people will still take revenge on us, even if they have to wait a year. We are very frightened and hope that the strike does not go ahead.[24]

Discontent was manifested not just in demands for higher wages but also in growing resentment of arbitrary and abusive treatment by European managers. In particular, Indonesian workers increasingly resented the symbolic actions of respect they were expected to perform towards Europeans, which included squatting on their heels in front of them and always speaking to them in Javanese rather than Malay. Early in 1918 the secretary of the Rembang branch of the PPPB urged the union to protect pawnshop workers from 'the bosses'. He complained of the attitude of Dutch managers towards Indonesian workers, in particular of the swearing and shouting directed at them. If pawnshop workers are not careful, he argued, they will become 'weak, crushed and trodden under foot'.[25] Frustration caused by the blocking of promotion prospects coincided with high inflation and the spread of anti-colonial ideas by Sarekat Islam and other nationalist parties which urged Indonesians to stand up for their rights against both Europeans and the Javanese aristocracy. This was a powerful mixture resulting in growing turmoil in the pawnshops.

Isolated incidents were reported in 1917 of Indonesian workers arguing with European managers or carrying out orders grudgingly. All seem to have been quickly settled, with the exception of an incident in the Grissee pawnshop (near Surabaya) in November that year. There a deputy manager and a valuer were first suspended then dismissed for indiscipline and impertinence towards the European manager. Relations between the two dismissed men and the manager had been strained for some months, not helped

by the manager's reputation for over-zealously demanding that proper respect be shown towards him. The immediate cause of the dismissal was the refusal of the deputy manager and the valuer to speak to an inspector in Javanese, preferring instead the more egalitarian Malay, and their refusal to squat on their heels before him. In hearing of the dismissals, thirteen other workers at the Grissee pawnshop signed a letter of protest to the manager and to the head of the Pawnshop Service at Batavia. They too were dismissed for insubordination. At this stage the PPPB stepped in, demanding the reinstatement of all fifteen workers and threatening a general strike in all Surabaya pawnshops if this was not done by 15 January 1918.

The issue was seen by many pawnshop workers as symptomatic of their treatment by Europeans as well as of their declining social and economic status. On New Year's Day 1918, forty PPPB members, led by the chairman of the Surabaya branch, staged a lively demonstration in Surabaya. Led by a kampung band, they marched to the house of the local pawnshop inspector, but finding him not at home stood outside in the street hurling insulting remarks and playing raucous music. Next stop was the house of the pawnshop manager, but he too was not at home. All the time a banner was carried aloft which read, in Malay:

> Here are loyal government servants! We will not sit on our heels and will not speak to the manager in Javanese. We dare to speak Malay in order to uphold the service by showing that the 'respect' circular is wrong. Long live the Pawnshop Service. Away with homage and squatting.[26]

The police were swiftly summoned and all forty demonstrators arrested. The following day they were fined by a local magistrate for disturbing the peace.[27]

The depth of feeling among Surabaya pawnshop workers was probably no surprise to the Yogyakarta leadership of the PPPB, but they were concerned to avoid spontaneous local strikes which might all too easily get out of control. Tjokroaminoto, chairman of the Central Sarekat Islam (CSI), member of the first *Volksraad* (People's Council) appointed in 1918 and adviser to the PPPB central executive, urged local leaders to avoid precipitate action at least until the PPPB central executive had spoken with the Governor-General, who, realizing the sensitivity of the issue, had agreed to receive a union delegation. The audience was successful,

with the Governor-General ordering the reinstatement of all fifteen Grissee workers and promising to investigate conditions in the Pawnshop Service.[28]

PPPB leaders saw the Governor-General's decision as a great victory for the union. It encouraged them in their conviction that the real barriers to fair treatment of Indonesian workers were European managers and that moderate but firm representation to the Indies government itself could be productive. It also strengthened their belief that occasional direct action at the local level strengthened their hand and that the threat of a general strike in the pawnshops was taken seriously by the government, causing it to more quickly attend to workers' grievances.

While the PPPB rejoiced in its victory, the European pawnshop employees union, the *Bond van Pandhuis Personeel,* lamented that it would only encourage indiscipline in the pawnshops and even greater reluctance by natives to obey orders from Europeans unquestioningly. The authority of Europeans, it argued, had been seriously damaged.[29] A long-serving European pawnshop manager wrote to his union journal in 1919 lamenting the changes of the past decade in native attitudes towards Europeans. He recalled nostalgically the relationships that used to exist in the pawnshops:

> It was as if we were committed to each other; love and sorrow were shared. If a worker was sick, he received medicine each day from my wife until he was well again. If a worker complained about the condition of his sick child and asked for help, then my wife and I were always ready to give help immediately. We would go to his house, sit on the couch next to the patient, and my wife would have genuine pleasure in holding the child and comforting it. Many were the occasions that my wife and I offered help when people were sick. Often we were awakened by the watchman in the middle of the night, to be told that one of my workers needed help, and even after midnight we were always ready to go with him to the workers' kampung in order to give assistance.

How different attitudes were ten years later:

> If we compare the situation of workers ten years ago and now, then it goes against the grain for us to see the extent of the change and the way in which they endeavour to cut themselves off from us. The openness once shown towards us is ended; here and there we see symptoms of fear of each other, efforts never to betray each to the other and therefore always, or at least as much as possible, pretending ignorance of each other.[30]

Success over the Grissee affair encouraged the PPPB to launch a membership drive throughout Java. Managers countered by transferring activists to other districts in an effort to break local ties of influence and power. The attitude of many European managers towards the PPPB was epitomized by the comments of one manager in the *Pandhuis Bond* journal, where he described Indonesian activists in pawnshops as 'terrorists'.[31] In order to boost managers' control, in October 1918 they were empowered to suspend or dismiss any Indonesian worker who behaved in a manner prejudicial to the maintenance of good order in the pawnshops.[32] This *usiran* (dismissal) circular put quite arbitrary powers into the hands of managers, which did nothing to improve relations between them and their workers. That managers did sometimes use the new powers arbitrarily and unfairly was admitted by the Head of the Pawnshop Service and indeed many dismissals were overturned on appeal.[33]

The *usiran* circular was strongly opposed by the PPPB, whose leaders spent a good deal of time over the next few years organizing dismissed workers' appeals and calming down workers at pawnshops where the new power had gone to managers' heads. Wildcat strikes broke out at a number of pawnshops as a result of what workers perceived to be unfair treatment. One such strike broke out at the Nganjuk pawnshop in May 1919. For some time the Sarekat Islam president at Nganjuk had complained to the regional inspector about the behaviour of the pawnshop manager, J. B. van Dobben. Workers accused him of being rough and ill-mannered, foul mouthed and prone to arbitrary behaviour, including striking and kicking workers and threatening them with a revolver.[34] The Pawnshop Service admitted that the strike on 14 May broke out after van Dobben had threatened a head cashier with a revolver. Work was resumed after an inspector had come to the pawnshop and persuaded the men to go back. The next day an assessor made a minor mistake, causing van Dobben to shout sarcastically, 'You cannot work well, but you can strike'. Workers stayed away from the pawnshop the following day, refusing to return until van Dobben was transferred. Even the persuasions of the local Regent and the inspector were to no avail. Such was the breakdown in relations between manager and workers, that the strike was only ended after van Dobben was first sent on leave and then transferred elsewhere.[35]

While PPPB leaders were granted meetings with the head of

the Pawnshop Service and even with the Governor-General, and while the central management of the Pawnshop Service maintained frequent contact with them, they were not accorded official recognition. Like all union officials, PPPB leaders correctly saw formal recognition by employers as crucial to their ability to sustain workers' support. The impact of inflation on wages was the basic reason for workers turning to labour unions in the immediate post-war years and union leaders realized the tenuousness of this support. If it was to be converted into a long-term commitment, then workers had to be persuaded that unions were permanent organizations able to defend their interests. Formal recognition remained a central plank in the platforms of all unions.

The Governor-General's response far from satisfied pawnshop workers. The PPPB central executive was inundated in January with calls from branches for an immediate strike. Indeed, a poll of pawnshop workers revealed that three-quarters of the 6,000 employed in the industry were prepared to strike if the PPPB gave the lead.[36] The Batavia branch had already telegrammed the Governor-General, threatening a general strike unless the wages of lower paid workers were substantially increased. An immediate strike was averted only after Tjokroaminoto urged the central executive to wait until the government introduced its 1920 Budget into the Volksraad before taking further action. While acquiescing to Tjokroaminoto's advice, the central executive was nevertheless conscious of the pressure mounting in the pawnshops and felt compelled to announce that it would call a strike in June if the wages issue was not satisfactorily resolved by then.[37] In order to show the government that it was serious in its intent, a strike committee was established, consisting of Alimin (president of the Batavia branch and later a prominent PKI leader), Tedjomartojo, Semaun (from the VSTP), Suroso (from the BOW) and Sosrokardono.[38]

The Pawnshop Service was sufficiently alarmed by the loud and persistent strike calls from the PPPB branches that inspectors were instructed to warn workers of the consequences of a strike. Late in January 1919 the inspector of the Pawnshop Service in Surabaya called on European and Indonesian managers to draw up contingency plans for the replacement of strikers by volunteers. Managers were urged to speak with their workers in order to discover their grievances and the motives behind the current unrest, but at the same time to warn that troublemakers would be dismissed.[39]

Similar warnings were issued by managers throughout Java and extra efforts were made to make life difficult for PPPB activists in the pawnshops. Not that pawnshop workers always passively listened to these lectures from their European managers. When the Inspector of Pawnshops in the Cirebon Residency told assembled workers that a strike was not proper behaviour for a *priyayi,* one of the workers piped up that, while he did not like the idea of going on strike, peaceful and respectful approaches by the PPPB had achieved little. Why, he asked, had the wages of managers been improved but not those of native workers? There is no record of any answer from the inspector.[40]

A general strike was the major item on the agenda of the PPPB congress at Bandung in May 1919. Sosrokardono explained to impatient delegates that the central executive was cautious about calling a strike, not because it was frightened but because it was concerned about being thoroughly prepared.[41] The basic problem, recognized by all central leaders, was the union's strike fund which, despite the efforts of branches and the special strike committee, could not support a strike for more than a few days. Given this situation, PPPB leaders made every effort to squeeze concessions out of the pawnshop management. A delegation from the central executive met the financial director of the Pawnshop Service on 22 June to press the eight demands made by the 1918 PPPB Congress — the most important of which were a wage rise of at least 25 per cent, an 8 hour day with provision for overtime payment, the withdrawal of the *usiran* circular, the establishment of a Council of Inquiry and Advice, and recognition of the PPPB.[42] Even though the government promised salary rises from the beginning of 1920, this did not calm the anger of pawnshop workers. The Batavia branch, for example, discussed the results of the PPPB delegation's meeting and the government's promises, but determined that the improvements were nowhere near adequate. It urged strike action. Such was the pressure on the central executive that it quickly called on all branches which did not yet have a strike sub-committee to set one up immediately.[43]

A further grievance emerged in 1919 which, because it concerned a matter of status, compounded pawnshop workers' fears about their declining career prospects. Pawnshop workers had always been required to take pawned articles from the office to the nearby store. Unclaimed articles were sold at the weekly auction, after first being displayed in an exhibition area in the store. On the

morning of an auction large quantities of goods had to be brought from the store to the shop before the auction began. Often the amount of goods to be moved in a hurry was too much for overworked labourers, and pawnshop assistants helped carry them to the shop. In 1919 complaints began to be heard from assistants that this work was not part of their duties and was demeaning to them. Some began to refuse to carry the goods, which led to their immediate dismissal. The issue simmered in 1919 and became an important item on the agenda of PPPB branch meetings and congresses in 1920 and 1921. It was seized on as a central grievance because for a large number of status conscious workers it symbolized the fading of their hopes that a job in the Pawnshop Service would lead to a dignified and well paid career. A sarcastic advertisement placed by the PPPB in the Sarekat Islam newspaper *Oetoesan Hindia* summed up the depth of cynicism and discontent:

A warning,
Do you want to become a slave?
Do you want to be ordered around like a dog, if you do not want to carry a rice steamer, a gong or a great chest?
Do you want to lose your worth as a person, and become a worthless stooge?
Do you want to live a more wretched existence than a goat?
If so
Inquire at the Pawnshop Service
For this way
You will readily be ordered around; you will readily be transferred and your life become harmed; you will easily become 'honourably' dismissed; you will be given heavy work without receiving overtime payments; receive wages which are too small; help fill the government's coffers by being transferred; must do work beneath your dignity; will become a tool of the poor people's usurers'.[44]

The Pawnshop Service rejected these complaints, pouring scorn on the union and Sarekat Islam leaders for their elitist position while at the same time talking of egalitarianism and democracy in the Indies. There was to be no compromise: those who refused to carry out tasks as directed by their managers would be dismissed.[45]

Some of the heat was taken out of pawnshop workers' grievances by moderate increases in wages for lower paid workers from the beginning of 1920. Nevertheless pawnshop employees continued to stop work over local disputes. On 8 March 1920, for

example, fifteen workers at the Cepu pawnshop in east Java became so incensed at arbitrary treatment by their manager over many years that they telegrammed the head of the Pawnshop Service stating that unless he was transferred they would strike.[46] The immediate cause of the strike threat was the manager refusing one worker permission to take his holidays, despite having approval from Head Office in Batavia. Workers had approached their local inspector on 5 March but had received scant attention. The inspector later reported that the Cepu pawnshop was infected with 'Bolshevik type' elements.[47] Workers were told to stay at work on pain of dismissal. The fifteen men who walked out on 8 March were immediately dismissed and replaced by men brought from pawnshops nearby.[48]

The depth of grassroots discontent can be gauged from the atmosphere at a mass meeting of pawnshop workers in Surabaya on 12 March. About 200 workers heard of the dismissal of their Cepu colleagues and amidst much restlessness and noise, with enthusiastic applause for the more militant speakers, there were loud cries of 'strike, strike, strike'. The meeting passed a motion stating that there would be a general strike of all pawnshop workers in the Surabaya region if the fifteen dismissed men were not reinstated and if the Pawnshop Service did not discipline the manager of the Cepu pawnshop.[49] The Pawnshop Service responded by making contingency plans for keeping pawnshops open in the event of a strike. Pawnshop workers would be brought in from other regions under police and army guard, men would be seconded from other government departments and, if necessary, the army would be asked to provide troops as strike breakers. Little wonder, then, that the local strike failed and that a wider strike did not materialize.[50]

The central executive of the PPPB continued to hold local branches in check, arguing that a general strike could only be held when the union was well organized with a large strike fund. One member summed up the feelings of many by arguing in *Oetoesan Hindia* that pawnshop workers had become no different from coolies and that PPPB leaders should quickly put their threat of a general strike into effect:

> Formerly pawnshop workers were able to eat twice each day, now we are able to eat once a day only; formerly pawnshop workers were able to eat white rice, now we are only able to eat red rice mixed with stalks; for-

merly we were able to drink coffee, but now we have to go to work in the morning making do with drinking water.[51]

A PPPB conference in May 1920 discussed the dismissal of the Cepu men and the union's failure to have them reinstated, but decided to postpone preparations for a general strike in the hope that negotiations with the Pawnshop Service and the Governor-General over a wide range of grievances might still be successful. The arbitrary treatment of workers by European managers, the need for workers to have legal rights and the need for a Grievance and Arbitration Commission were isolated as the three critical areas. If no headway was made by the end of 1920, the conference decided to call a special congress to decide either on mass resignations or a general strike.[52]

Soeara Boemipoetra, the voice of the PPPB, explained the conference decision to members and urged them to save their money so that they had enough to see them through a three month strike.[53] A later article argued that times had changed and that Indonesian pawnshop workers would show both the government and the European *Panduisbond* this if they had to: 'The times are completely changed, the wheel has turned; those who were on top are underneath and the poor have become rich and exalted. That is the will of God and men cannot stop it'.[54]

The decision by PPPB leaders to postpone direct action appeared to be vindicated when in June 1920 the Governor-General instructed his General Adviser for Social Matters, J. B. Peyrott, to investigate labour relations in the pawnshops. Peyrott reported in February 1921 but, while he was critical of the inadequacy of the 1920 wage rise, he rejected the complaints made by the PPPB over the past years. Reflecting the convictions of most government officials that urban workers were being stirred up by irresponsible agitators, he reported:

> . . . that the supposed grievances and complaints must be regarded as so many unreasonable demands, flowing from the efforts of people outside the service who misuse the labour movement in an irresponsible manner for their own advantage and political ends.[55]

He did, however, recommend the establishment of a permanent commission, with representation from European and Indonesian labour unions as well as from the pawnshop management, to handle grievances as they arose. The recommendation was not

immediately acted on, though after the pawnshop strike in January 1922 a Grievance Commission was finally established. There was no question, though, of PPPB representation on the Grievance Commission. Even if the union had not been discredited in the government's eyes by its involvement in the strike, representation would have been tantamount to recognition and this could not be countenanced.

At the beginning of 1921 relations between workers and management in the Pawnshop Service were severely strained, with pressure building on PPPB leaders to organize a general strike. Younger workers made the running. Ambitious and relatively well educated, they were no longer prepared to put up with what their elders had accepted. As in most other unions, PPPB leaders were struggling to control their members' impatience and were well aware that in order to maintain their support they would have to satisfy some of their grievances, if not by negotiations then by other means.

RAILWAY WORKERS

AT the same time as the PPPB was edging towards a major strike, the railway workers union, the VSTP, was moving into a new phase after ten years of steady growth. Although it still had many serious deficiencies, the VSTP was the best organized labour union in Java, rivalled only by the pawnshop workers union. A gradual radicalization process had been occurring since 1915 when Indonesians became the majority of members. The vitality within the VSTP reflected the energies of the activists in its central executive. Within this group Semaun, as chairman, continued to show a maturity well beyond his years with seemingly boundless energy to pour into not only the VSTP but also the labour union federation, Sarekat Islam, the PKI and a host of lesser unions. The VSTP was, however, his major union base and, perhaps because it was through the VSTP that he had been introduced to the labour movement and political activity, it remained of special importance to him.

Two other key members of the VSTP central executive in Semarang were Pieter Bergsma, its administrator, and Kadarisman, its secretary. Bergsma had arrived in the Indies in 1904 and had served as a sergeant in the colonial army until pensioned in 1918, shortly after his involvement in the ISDV organization of Soviets among soldiers and sailors in Surabaya. In the wake of the

Bolshevik Revolution, the political turmoil in the Netherlands aroused hopes among socialists in the colony that a revolution in their homeland was in the offing. On leaving the army, Bergsma worked for the VSTP and continued to contribute to the ISDV journal, *Het Vrije Woord*.[56] Kadarisman shared an educational and occupational background with Semaun. Ten years older than Semaun, he was born in Pasuruan, east Java, in 1890. He was educated at a Second Class Native School and worked with a railway company, the Semarang-Joana Steamtram Company, until dismissed in 1915, presumably because of his involvement with the VSTP. He was immediately given employment by the VSTP, first as a clerk in its Semarang office and from 1917 as union secretary. He was later to become a prominent member of the PKI and was arrested in November 1926, along with thousands of other PKI members.[57]

As in other unions, it was the ordinary workers in the workplaces and on the trains and trams who were exerting increasing pressure on VSTP leaders to sanction direct action against employers. Under pressure from below, the VSTP annual meeting in November 1919 adopted a series of demands which formed the basis of the union's negotiations with railway companies over the next three years. They included demands for: the introduction of an 8 hour working day, the establishment of a minimum wage, the establishment of a permanent arbitration court, the legal regulation of labour, abolition of the hierarchical authority structure in the industry, abolition of arbitrary powers to supervisors and formal recognition of the VSTP.[58]

These general demands were translated into specific claims on all railway companies in November for wage increases and improvements in meal money, working hours, holidays and rest periods. Simultaneous meetings were held by more than fifty branches on 20 December to explain these demands to members and to demonstrate to railway managements ordinary workers' support for the union. Each meeting called on the central executive to organize further mass meetings to discuss the replies from railway managements and then to consider whether or not to strike.[59] In succeeding months the columns of VSTP journals, *Volharding* in Dutch and *Si Tetap* in Malay, were full of slogans exhorting workers to prepare themselves for strike action if necessary, but to do nothing more than this until instructions were received from the central executive.[60]

The companies were unmoved by the detailed case put forward by the VSTP or by the threat of strike action. The larger companies — the State Railways, the Sister Societies and the NIS — all argued that they had already significantly improved wages and conditions in the past two years and that further improvements were scheduled for January 1920. This response was probably expected. But before launching industrial action VSTP leaders were aware that they had to strengthen the administrative and financial base of the union. However, they were confronted in 1920 and 1921 with disputes which arose from local grievances and were under local leadership. Rhetoric about direct action aside, VSTP central leaders worked hard to restrain their branches and tried to bring these local disputes under control. They were firmly opposed to isolated strikes, believing that they had little chance of succeeding and that they were more likely to lead to the destruction of the union by management or government.

The first of the wildcat strikes broke out on 1 May 1920 at the Probolinggo Steamtram Company, a small privately owned company operating lines connecting the port of Probolinggo in east Java with a number of sugar factories along the coast and in the hinterland. Wages and conditions were considerably worse in these small companies than in the three large networks. The VSTP central executive had first warned of discontent among Probolinggo Steamtram workers in November 1919. No reply was received from the company. In April 1920 it again warned that discontent was nearing flashpoint, and urged the manager to meet its propagandist Kadarisman and two members of the Probolinggo branch executive to discuss the matter.

The strike broke out before any reply was received. The VSTP claimed that 90 per cent of Probolinggo Steamtram Company workers were union members and that all struck on 1 May. The company responded by dismissing them all and recruiting unskilled labour to work alongside the two engine drivers remaining at work. It managed to keep a skeleton service going during the strike, enough to prevent an unmanageable build-up of processed sugar at the factories. Although it had not called the strike, indeed had tried to calm workers' anger, once it broke out and the company took retaliatory action, the VSTP central executive was forced to try to rescue the situation. It managed to persuade the company to offer a wage rise of 10 cents per day, but failed to have all strikers re-employed. By the end of May, the company was

operating normally, re-employing those strikers whose skills it needed but replacing all unskilled and semi-skilled workers.[61] The VSTP had no bargaining power and could do no more than register a strong protest with the government over the callousness of the company.

This defeat only strengthened VSTP leaders' resolve to tighten their control over local leaders and to redouble their efforts to persuade railway workers to stay calm and wait on instructions from Semarang instead of taking unilateral action. All this was to no avail. On 12 August 1920 a European station master at the SCS Station in Cirebon, central Java, rebuked a foreman shunter and fined another shunter for alleged breaches of work discipline. Two days later the foreman shunter and four shunters stayed away from work. An impromptu meeting of workers was held later that day and as a consequence no shunters, pointsmen, signalmen or brakesmen, thirty men in all, turned up for work the following day, a Saturday. By Monday 18 August the station master was the sole worker at the Cirebon station.[62] Once again taken unawares by local action, the VSTP central executive had no choice but to try to bring it under its control. It was yet another example of how union leaders spent much of their time trying to prevent local strikes erupting and, when they did break out, trying to get workers back to work so that they could negotiate with employers.

A seemingly trivial incident had sparked off the strike. The real motives were more deep seated. The strike occurred in the middle of an extremely busy period for the SCS, with heavy tonnages of sugar being hauled from the hinterland to the port of Cirebon. Skilled and semi-skilled labour was in unusually short supply, with workers at the Cirebon station forced to work extremely long hours, commencing around 6 a.m. and working through to around 10.30 p.m., with only short breaks for meals. For this arduous work they received only their normal wages, there being no provision for overtime payments in the SCS. Discontent had been building up for some time within the SCS stations and among workgangs, brought to a head in August 1920 by improvements to wages and conditions in the State Railways. On 10 August the government announced that lower paid workers in the State Railways would receive a 60 per cent cost-of-living allowance, backdated to 1 January 1920. A few days later, some hundreds of State Railways workers in Cirebon found themselves with unexpected money in their hands. As State Railways and SCS

workers worked and lived in close proximity to each other, the SCS workers were understandably aggrieved at what they saw as a clear injustice. Not only were they compelled to work long hours for no extra pay, but their fellow workers at the State Railways were now receiving considerably more money than they were. The ill words that passed between the station master and the foreman shunter on 12 August were enough to trigger off the only response the workers knew — a refusal to work.[63]

Having walked off the job, SCS workers did what so many other workers had done before and would continue to do in the future. They turned to their union branch officials for help. A meeting was held on the night of 14 August and a series of demands drawn up, with the SCS given until noon on 18 August to satisfy them, failing which a general strike of the entire SCS network would be called. The three demands were: a 60 per cent cost-of-living allowance backdated to January 1920, introduction of an 8 hour working day and the establishment of an arbitration board.[64] On the following two nights meetings of SCS workers were held at Tegal and Semarang, the other major towns on the SCS network, where large numbers of workers unanimously agreed to similar demands on the company.

The situation was explosive when Bergsma and Kadarisman arrived at Tegal and Cirebon to gauge the mood of workers and to urge local officials to heed the leadership of Semarang. The Resident of Semarang joined them in urging the SCS to solve the dispute by immediately announcing that its workers would be given the same conditions as those in the State Railways. On 17 August Kadarisman and Bergsma met with the Residents of Cirebon and Pekalongan, learnt that the SCS was prepared to improve wages and conditions immediately and agreed to call off the proposed strike. The Semarang leaders were now faced with the difficult task of persuading SCS workers to trust them. That evening at a meeting in Cirebon, and again the following night at a meeting in Semarang, Bergsma urged workers to accept the SCS promise that wages would be raised immediately to the same level as State Railways workers.[65] An announcement to this effect was distributed to all SCS stations and workplaces on 18 August and on the strength of this the thirty strikers returned to work.[66]

Despite the success of VSTP leaders in persuading workers to return to work, discontent in the SCS continued to simmer. Its extent was made plain to Semarang leaders at a members' meeting

in Semarang on 23 September when Semaun announced the details of the wage increases granted by the SCS. The SCS had placed its workers on a par with those in the State Railways, but this fell a long way short of the demanded 60 per cent increase together with overtime payments after an 8 hour working day. Workers at the meeting were in an angry mood, feeling not only cheated by the Company but also let down by their union leaders. They refused to accept the agreement made on their behalf by the VSTP. Instead, they demanded satisfaction within fourteen days, failing which they would strike.[67]

On 6 October engine drivers and firemen at the Cirebon station of the SCS carried out their threat, bringing much of the SCS system to a standstill. The SCS had still not paid its members according to the new rates, blaming lack of clerical staff for the delay. There was considerable distrust of the company among railway workers — demonstrated at a VSTP meeting in Cirebon on 6 October when repeated calls came from the floor of, 'Where is the money, we want to see the money'.[68] Engine drivers and firemen were particularly angry because the newly introduced wages put them only on a par with tramway staff of the State Railways who were paid less than the railways staff. The strike quickly spread to engine drivers and firemen at Pekalongan and Tegal. The SCS network was severely disrupted, with only express trains running, driven by European crews.[69]

Once again VSTP leaders hurried to Cirebon to try to bring the dispute under control. Semaun and Bergsma met with SCS management, pointing out that while delays in the payment of the new rates might be quite understandable to the company, it was another matter to persuade workers that they were not being cheated. While pressuring the SCS to pay the increases as soon as possible, Semaun and Bergsma tried also to persuade strikers to return to work and trust their union leaders to get the increases paid to them. Anxious to restrict the strike to Cirebon, members of the central executive travelled to other branches on the Sister Societies network urging workers to stay on the job. A manifesto circulated by Semaun and Bergsma urged SCS workers to wait on the VSTP congress in December which would plan stronger action to improve conditions for all railway workers.[70] Semaun did, however, promise that if the SCS imposed fines on the strikers the VSTP would consider proclaiming a general strike in the company. Although still unhappy with the company's treatment of them,

strikers finally accepted Semaun's urgings and went back to work on 10 October.[71]

The VSTP held its annual congress in December 1920 in Semarang with its leaders conscious of growing grass roots militancy. The congress carried a series of detailed demands on all railway managements, including improvements in wages, reduction in working hours, increased allowances and improved company housing.[72] The demands were served on the three major companies in 1921, together with a warning from VSTP leaders that they would not be able to keep workers' discontent under control much longer. Semaun and Bergsma, realizing that workers' militancy gave them a good bargaining position with employers, warned the companies 'that the workers will resort to spontaneous protests if these demands are not acceded to'.[73]

Semaun's warning about the possibility of spontaneous protests was borne out in June 1921 when another wildcat strike broke out, this time in the Malang Tram Company in east Java. There had been discontent in this company for some years, largely because of bad wages and conditions but also because the manager took a hard line against VSTP attempts to recruit his workers. In August 1918 the VSTP Malang branch propagandist in the company, a man named Abdulrachman, had been physically beaten by the manager, causing indignation among his fellow workers and agitation for a strike. The Semarang central executive had to send one of its members to Malang to calm the workers down by promising to send a circular around the company inquiring into wages, conditions and maltreatment.[74] When in October Abdulrachman circulated the VSTP questionnaire among his fellow workers he was immediately dismissed. He was then taken on by the VSTP as the secretary of its Malang branch, which only further strained relations between manager and union.[75]

In July 1920, after Bergsma had come from Semarang to try to persuade the manager to discuss workers' grievances with Abdulrachman, the manager conducted his own referendum of workers in an effort to prove his assertion that Abdulrachman represented only a tiny minority of them. To his chagrin, the great majority of workers stated they supported Abdulrachman. Workers again threatened to strike in August 1920 because the company failed to respond to the demands passed by the 1919 VSTP congress. A members' meeting forced a reluctant Malang union executive to

telegram Semarang requesting the central executive to send a representative to Malang immediately to do something about workers' grievances. Bergsma once more journeyed from Semarang, met the local executive and discussed workers' demands with the company manager. Having gained an undertaking that the company would make a speedy reply to these demands, Bergsma was able to persuade a rowdy meeting of workers to set aside any thoughts of direct action for the time being.[76]

The strike in June 1921 was triggered by the company's slowness in paying its normal bonus of two months' wages just before Lebaran, the festive period marking the end of the Islamic fasting month. The manager paid only a bonus of one month's wages because, he said, he had not received approval from Holland for the full two months' bonus. The issue was complicated because workers had already received an extra month's wages in the middle of May to celebrate the company's twenty-fifth anniversary. Their expectation was that another two months' bonus would be paid as usual in June so that they would have extra money to pay for Lebaran festivities. When only a one month's bonus was offered, the majority refused to accept it, demanding the immediate payment of two months' wages. An argument broke out between five engine drivers and their supervisors, resulting in the drivers going home. The company dismissed them and the following day all Indonesian workers went on strike.

The Semarang leadership of the VSTP was far from pleased at yet another case of members beginning a strike without prior consultation with it. Union organization in Malang was weak and there was a poor level of identification with the union. The branch had been suspended in March after its executive had failed to send members' contributions to Semarang for almost a year.[77] Bergsma hurried to Malang and urged a mass meeting of strikers to return to work so that he could negotiate with the company on their behalf. The workers were in no mood for further procrastination and rejected Bergsma's advice, after one of their number with a strong local following spoke fervently against it. Over the next few days, the strikers continued to refuse Bergsma's advice to return to work, despite his assurances that the company had promised him that it would pay the bonus as usual. Even the efforts of the Malang chairman of Sarekat Islam failed to persuade them to go back to work. Bergsma later argued that because the strike had

temporarily brought the tramway to a halt, workers believed they were winning, blinding themselves to the probability of company retaliation.

By the end of June the Malang Tram Company had broken the strike by employing new workers, and was able to operate normally once more. Despite further discussions at the end of June, Bergsma and Kadarisman failed to get strikers re-employed. The company clearly believed that it had once and for all shown the workers the folly of their ways and had permanently weakened VSTP influence among them. It was probably right. The VSTP editorialized that the abject failure of the strike was a clear lesson that unorganized action by workers would only lead to personal misery and a weakening of the union.[78]

When the VSTP served the demands adopted by its 1920 congress on the three major networks, it had given them until October 1921 to respond. The October deadline passed with none of the demands met. VSTP leaders still put off direct action, though rumours abounded from the middle of the year that a general railway strike was imminent. They were conscious of the small VSTP strike fund, caused by members' unwillingness to pay their dues on time or sometimes at all, and aware also that organizational weaknesses in the union made it difficult to achieve a coordinated Java-wide strike.[79] In January 1921 the union held f5,000 in its strike fund, a huge amount by the standards of other unions but not enough to sustain a brief strike let alone a protracted one.[80] The threat of a possible strike if conditions were not improved was seen as a potent weapon, but one which VSTP leaders hoped they would not have to use. Railway workers' discontent showed no sign of abating, however, maintaining pressure on union leaders to do something to force improvements from railway managements in order to retain credibility.

A LABOUR UNION FEDERATION

THE idea of a coordinating body for the growing number of labour unions was discussed by ISDV members as early as 1915.[81] Cooperation between unions during the cost-of-living campaign in 1917 and 1918 stimulated wider debate on the advantages of a permanent coordinating body. The establishment of the *Verbond van Landsdienaren* (Federation of Government Employees — VVL) by European unions of government employees and the Indonesian

teachers' union (PGHB) in 1918 was a further stimulus. Semaun took up this theme in June 1918 in a widely published article in the Malay language press in which he argued that the cooperation seen in Europe between labour unions had yet to be achieved in the Indies. He saw a labour union federation as organizing courses, giving moral and material support to workers and organizing new unions for groups of workers yet to be unionized.[82] He followed this by inviting the central executives of all Indonesian unions to send representatives to a conference in Semarang to discuss forming a federation; but little progress was made as representatives from only two unions, the VSTP and the PPPB, turned up.[83]

Persistence was one of Semaun's strengths. The interest shown by the PPPB encouraged him to continue discussions with it, culminating in his attending its congress at Bandung in May the following year where he argued vigorously for the immediate creation of a labour union federation. This time his efforts were rewarded; the congress established a committee under Semaun's leadership to draw up detailed plans for a federation in time for presentation to the CSI congress in Surabaya at the end of October. The *Comite van de Vakcentrale* (Labour Union Committee) met in Bandung in July and endorsed statutes prepared by Semaun for the establishment of a *Revolutionaire Vakcentrale* (Revolutionary Federation of Labour Unions). The committee, which included among its members Surjopranoto, Alimin and Kadarisman, further decided that the federation would be established at a meeting of labour unions to be held in Yogyakarta in November. Finally, it nominated candidates for the central executive, including Sosrokardono as chairman, Surjopranoto as vice-chairman and Salim as adviser, all three of whom were Yogyakarta leaders of the CSI.[84] Semaun began a four month jail sentence at the end of July, convicted of transgressing the colony's draconian press laws. He was therefore unable to be present at the fourth CSI congress which opened in Surabaya on 26 October where discussion of his committee's report took place.[85] The issue of the federation's name was the only major area of contention, as delegates from forty-four labour unions were united in their conviction that a federation should be formed immediately.[86]

The argument over the federation's name was far more than merely a semantic debate. The heated debate produced some fiery speeches, notably from Mas Marco, a noted radical journalist who had aroused the ire of the colonial government on many occasions,

representing the Wonotantomo (Forestry Workers), and strong passionate attacks on foreign capitalism for causing the impoverishment of the people of the Indies. In the words of Sunjoto, the VSTP representative, capitalism was bad because 'Money makes what is crooked right and what is right crooked'.[87] But while all agreed that capitalism was bad, and that a labour federation was needed to coordinate and strengthen individual union activities, they could reach no agreement on the proposal to include the word 'revolutionary' in the federation's name.

Surjopranoto, representing both the Union of Sugar Factory Workers (PFB) and the CSI, argued strongly that the word 'revolution' was unnecessary and indeed misrepresented the federation's aims:

> We want no violent revolution; when we speak of a revolutionary federation of labour unions it is only a slogan. We want a class struggle, and the establishment of collective ownership of the means of production and capital.[88]

Bergsma, from the VSTP and the ISDV, and Mas Marco strongly disagreed, arguing that if the federation was not revolutionary then it would run the serious risk of eventually reneging on the true interests of the workers. They might have expected support from their radical Batavian colleague Alimin, but to the surprise of many this was not forthcoming. He explained how he had travelled widely in Java over the past six months speaking with labour unions about the proposed federation, and had found many people employed by the government afraid of losing their jobs if they became members of an organization called 'revolutionary socialist'. He personally was not afraid, and ideologically clearly preferred the word 'revolutionary' to be included in the federation's name, but he saw no reason to provoke unnecessary difficulties. He proposed, therefore, that the federation simply be called a *Vakcentrale*. Salim supported Alimin, arguing that the time was not right for revolution as the people were 'much too asleep to do anything energetic'. In the absence of Semaun the arguments of the CSI leaders won the day, though the final decision was deferred until the meeting called to inaugurate the federation in December.

At a convention in Yogyakarta on 25 and 26 December 1919, the labour union federation was finally born.[89] The heated debate of Surabaya in October was repeated, with similar arguments

advanced by both sides. As at the Surabaya meeting, those who wanted a 'revolutionary' federation were in a minority. Semaun, recently released from jail, again showed his essential pragmatism by quickly assessing the mood of the meeting and, putting the interests of unity in the labour movement ahead of the issue of its name, accepting the majority decision to adopt the politically less sensitive title of *Perserikatan Pergerakan Kaum Buruh* (PPKB — Association of Labour Unions). Perhaps in a reciprocal gesture, the majority of delegates, who had opposed Semaun's view on the name of the federation, supported his candidature for chairman, ahead of that of the CSI's Sosrokardono. With Semaun as chairman, the convention made the sensible decision to base the PPKB in Semarang until a permanent executive was elected at an inaugural congress the following year. Three prominent ISDV and VSTP members were elected to the provisional executive — Semaun as chairman, Najoan as secretary and Bergsma as treasurer — with Surjopranto named as vice-chairman. Semaun had lost the battle over the name of the federation but had won organizational control. If it was to have any chance of success it needed Semaun's energy and ideological commitment.

Within a few months branches of the PPKB were established throughout Java, with local leaders of the railway workers union, pawnshop workers union and sugar factory workers union taking the initiative. From the beginning, efforts were made to establish strike funds in each branch as well as at the central level, with much enthusiastic talk of a new chapter having begun in the struggle to improve the workers' lot. Some delegates to the Surabaya and Yogyakarta meetings which established the PPKB had expressed the hope that the federation would become the workers' counterpart to the Radical Concentration, formed in 1918 as a loose alliance of nationalist parties in the Volksraad. A few, including Tjokroaminoto and Suardi, waxed lyrical about the PPKB becoming the 'Upper House' to the Radical Concentration 'Lower House', with a joint secretariat publishing their deliberations.[90] This vision splendid quickly faded as neither organization proved able to realize its creators' hopes.

THE PPKB AND PRINTING WORKERS

ALMOST immediately after its formation the PPKB became involved in a four month strike by printing workers in Semarang.

The availability of detailed information on this strike from a number of sources enables a close analysis of the grievances of workers, the way in which they organized themselves during the strike and the nature of the support structures set up to aid strikers.

The post-war inflation caused workers at Van Dorp and Company, the largest printing company in Semarang with a labour force of about 250, to approach their employer at the end of 1919 for better wages and conditions. Dissatisfaction among Van Dorp workers had been growing since the middle of the year when a brief strike of compositors and printers forced the dismissal of an unpopular foreman and the payment of a two month salary advance to tide them through Lebaran.[91] A deputation of foremen and older workers approached the company manager on the workers' behalf in December. The manager rejected their request. Having failed to obtain redress through normal channels, and with a deep sense of injustice that their legitimate grievances were being ignored, a group of workers, many of whom were Sarekat Islam members, turned for help to the leaders of the workers' department of the Semarang Sarekat Islam.[92]

The Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam had for some time been trying to organize workers in industry-wide unions but with only limited success. Semaun had launched the *Inlandsche Zettersbond* in June 1918 but it had been largely inactive in the year and a half since then. When the angry group of Van Dorp workers approached the workers' department executive in December 1919 seeking support for an immediate strike, the executive had to work hard to persuade them of the folly of immediate strike action when they were neither unionized nor had a strike fund.[93] The workers' department took over leadership of the dispute, seizing its chance to increase its profile among an important group of the city's workers. On 2 February 1920 Najoan organized a meeting of Van Dorp workers, which under his guidance made four demands on the company: a 50 per cent wage rise, two weeks' annual leave, a bonus at Lebaran and double time for working on Sundays and holidays.

The workers were in a militant mood, with repeated demands for an immediate strike. Najoan calmed them down, persuading them to postpone direct action until he had had a chance to try to negotiate on their behalf with the Van Dorp management. The same day the Sarekat Islam workers' department sent a letter to

Van Dorp stating the workers' demands and threatening a strike if they were not agreed to within four days. The company refused to discuss the matter with Najoan or with any other Sarekat Islam leader, stating that it would not recognize any trade union or any organization led by people not employed in the industry. On the morning of 8 February, when Van Dorp workers again met to discuss the company's response to their demands, there was a loud demand for immediate strike action, a demand which drowned out Sarekat Islam leaders' calls for calm. Concerned at reports of workers angrily calling for a strike, and alarmed also that he might have misjudged their mood, that same evening the Van Dorp manager sent a circular around his workers' kampungs promising an immediate wage rise of 5 cents per day and increased meal allowances from 5-10 cents a day.

This offer came too late to prevent 281 workers striking on the morning of 9 February. The Sarekat Islam workers' department organized a further mass meeting for the night of 10 February, in the meantime asking Van Dorp to increase its offer so that the strike could be swiftly brought to an end. The request was refused, on the grounds that if its offer was increased it would be uncompetitive with other printing companies in Semarang. This was further proof to Semaun, Najoan and local Sarekat Islam labour union leaders that only an industry-wide union would be able to force uniform wages and conditions in the printing industry and prevent workers from being exploited. They immediately announced the formation of a *Typografenbond* (Printers Union) with Najoan as provisional secretary.[94] The *Typografenbond* appears to have absorbed the earlier but inactive *Inlandsche Zetters-bond.*

On the night of 10 February about 3,000 people crammed into a local cinema, with another 2,000 turned away.[95] The meeting had been advertised in all printing companies in Semarang and throughout the city's kampungs. There was a carnival atmosphere at the meeting, which was attended by workers from a wide range of industries as well as by compositors and printers. The meeting empowered the newly formed *Typografenbond* to serve a set of demands on all Semarang printing companies, giving them ten days to make a satisfactory reply.

Alarmed at these developments, managers of all the printing companies in Semarang met on 12 February to coordinate their response. They decided, in line with all other employers in the

colony, that they would in no circumstances recognize labour unions, let alone negotiate with them. A stinging attack on the *Typografenbond* was published the following day by the major Dutch language newspaper in Semarang, *Locomotief*, stating that employers would never negotiate with politically inspired organizations:

> The meeting of compositors and printers organized in the cinema is clear proof that we do not have a normal and lawful labour union movement here but a performance of revolutionary political intent, in which the people in the labour union are the puppets rather than the performers.[96]

The battle lines were now drawn, with employers determined to break the strike and with it the fledgling printing union. In this situation, Semaun saw a chance to flex the muscles of the labour union federation, the PPKB. On 13 February the PPKB executive discussed the strike with the executive of the *Typografenbond* and changed the workers' demands to what it considered more realistic ones: a wage rise of 20 per cent or a minimum of f1 per week, double time for working on Sundays and holidays, a 10 cents per day meal allowance and the replacement of the traditional annual bonus by a profit sharing scheme jointly organized by the companies and the *Typografenbond*. Semaun undertook to serve these modified proposals on the Van Dorp manager, but in the meantime urged workers at other companies to stay on the job while negotiations continued. On 18 February Semaun, in the name of the PPKB, wrote to the employers' association seeking a conference to resolve the Van Dorp strike. The response was predictable: a curt refusal to meet with any union. Undeterred, and trying to avoid an industry-wide strike if at all possible, Semaun wrote again on 20 February explaining that it was important to try to settle the matter quickly because the workers clearly wanted to strike. No reply was received.

A mass meeting of workers on 22 February decided that they had been patient long enough and demanded an immediate industry-wide strike. Still the PPKB leaders urged caution, arguing that some of the smaller companies had just broken ranks with the employers association by giving a. 10 per cent wage increase together with an increase in meal allowances. The pressure for a strike was, however, too great for Semaun to resist any longer. He proposed that the following morning workers at the *Locomotief* printing works hold a meeting soon after arriving at work and elect

three of their number to join two executive members of the *Typografenbond* in seeking a meeting with the manager in order to gain improvements in wages. No doubt Semaun hoped that the presence of three elected workers might persuade the manager that there really were grievances among his workers and that they were not simply being stirred up by outsiders. The manager of the *Locomotief* printery was also chairman of the newly formed Printing Employers Association: if he could be persuaded of the justice of workers' demands then all companies would probably fall into line.

The stopwork meeting was duly held on the morning of 23 February and delegates sent off to meet the manager of the *Locomotief*. *Typografenbond* and PPKB leaders waited for news in the Sarekat Islam offices. Before the delegates returned, workers from three other printing companies raced in to the offices announcing that they had been ordered to go to work at the *Locomotief*, had refused and had then gone on strike. Apparently, as soon as the *Locomotief* workers stopped work to elect their deputation, the manager activated a pre-arranged plan and called on other printing companies to send replacement labour in anticipation of a strike. To make his stance even clearer, he refused to allow the union members of the delegation into his office, agreeing only to talk with the three elected delegates from his workers. Not that this made any difference, for he point-blank refused their demands, including, of course, recognition of their union. That evening most printing workers in Semarang were on strike.[97]

Semaun later argued that the industry-wide strike need never have occurred if employers had not adopted an intransigent attitude toward the *Typografenbond* and the PPKB and had instead negotiated with them as representatives of the workers. This, of course, was the central issue: for the companies to enter into negotiations would have been tantamount to recognition of the union, something they were determined to refuse under any circumstances. Forced into a strike, the PPKB made every effort to ensure that it was not crushed. It was important that the strike was won, or at least that it could be seen not to have been totally lost, not only for the sake of the workers themselves but also because it had become an important test of PPKB strength. Defeat on its first involvement in a strike would be a severe setback to Semaun's plans for the future development of the labour movement.

The Van Dorp strikers numbered 317 but from 23 February,

when workers at the seven major companies in Semarang joined the strike, a total of 819 people were involved.[98] PPKB leaders threw themselves into raising money in their support, with Semaun, Kadarisman and Bergsma touring major cities in Java urging support and trying also to prevent the recruitment of strike breakers by the Semarang companies. Over the next two months f9,948 was raised by the federation, ranging from small individual donations and collections taken up at protest meetings to sums collected in workplaces and contribution lists sent around the kampungs of Semarang, Surabaya and Batavia. Strikers unable to get other jobs were paid each Sunday on a sliding scale depending on their income.[99] Many strikers were able to get odd jobs in the city, but most suffered heavily despite the strike pay and material support given them by families and neighbours. Some were forced to sell clothes or furniture or to pawn domestic or personal items in order to raise money.[100]

By the end of March all companies, except Van Dorp where the strike had begun, had conceded some of their workers' demands. Wages were increased by 20 per cent and meal money raised to 10 cents per day – less than had been demanded but sufficient to persuade workers to return. The companies were under pressure from the Resident of Semarang to compromise with workers, as he recognized the justice of their demands. Equally important, because many of the strikers were skilled compositors and printing machine operators, the companies were forced to reduce their operations drastically. Strike breakers could be recruited for the unskilled jobs but skilled labour was in short supply and the PPKB was largely successful in persuading skilled printing workers in other cities against being lured to Semarang by offers of bonuses. For the smaller companies and for the three companies that printed daily newspapers it quickly became apparent that their best interests would be served by meeting the strikers' demands. However, Van Dorp held out until 12 April, when a majority of the strikers conceded defeat and returned to work on the old conditions. But when the company refused to re-employ thirty strikers, whom it accused of being the instigators of the strike, the workers walked out again. Despite Bergsma's threat that the strike would be extended to its Surabaya branch, the Van Dorp manager stood firm on his right to re-employ only those whom he wished.[101] This second strike lasted almost another month, before Van Dorp agreed to pay its workers the increased

rates paid by all other Semarang printing companies since the end of March. It seems, though, that it held firm on not re-employing all of the strikers.

The Semarang printers' strike demonstrated that where a group of skilled workers in short supply could maintain some measure of solidarity in the face of employers' divisive tactics they could force employers to come to terms with their demands. The success of the printers' strike was also in part a reflection of the printing industry's profitability in the immediate post-war years, with a shortage of printing capacity enabling companies to pass on higher labour costs with ease and still maintain substantial profits. Of course, in this strike the government had remained neutral; indeed at a crucial stage in late March it had suggested to employers that the workers had a just claim. If the government had been hostile, then the result may have been very different. PPKB leaders, particularly Semaun, drew the obvious lesson from the strike. To the extent that it had been successful it was because the PPKB had been able to coordinate and channel workers' demands. It had also been able to raise support funds and prevent skilled workers from outside Semarang being used as strike breakers. It was clear that to have any chance of success unions had to organize themselves not only on a local basis but on an industry and Java-wide basis. To this end he moved immediately to create a Java-wide *Typografenbond* in order to bring together in one organization printing workers in every major town and city in Java.

Printing workers in other cities in Java had been unionized for some time before the establishment of the *Typografenbond* in Semarang. All of these unions were very small, enrolling only a fraction of the printing workers in their cities, and mostly under the leadership of activists in the local Sarekat Islam branches. The Semarang-based *Typografenbond*, increasingly operating under the Indonesian name of *Sarekat Buruh Tjitak*, quickly moved to convert these already existing unions into branches of itself. During 1920 it was successful in establishing branches at the major cities of Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Pekalongan, Malang, Tegal, Cirebon and Bandung, apparently absorbing the small local unions. The initiative was generally taken by the chairman of the local PPKB branch, and a majority of branch executive members were people from outside the industry.[102]

Strikes broke out among printing workers in most of the

Javanese cities during 1919 and 1920, in all cases spontaneous walkouts by workers, who then turned to the *Sarekat Buruh Tjitak* for support.[103] The central executive was far from happy at this approach, or about the tendency of local branches to involve themselves in strikes without prior consultation with Semarang. The Pekalongan branch executive was admonished in June 1920 for calling a strike without its approval. Nevertheless, the central executive agreed to support it '. . . like a father who is unable to leave his child in the lurch, even if that child is very naughty'.[104] Such language well expresses the paternalistic approach of well-educated union leaders towards their members, an approach not always appreciated by workers.

All of the strikes were caused by employers' refusal to concede wage demands for their skilled compositors and printers. In some cases these skilled workers then resigned as a group, indicating their confidence in employers' inability to replace them, or they simply walked off the job until wage rises were conceded. Strikes in Semarang and Surabaya were successful, but elsewhere workers had their share of failures. Strikes at the Nix printery in Bandung and at the printery of the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* in January 1920 were unsuccessful. Both strikes failed because the Printing Employers Association in Batavia and Bandung promised support if the companies made no concessions.

Despite the occasional defeat, workers in the printing industry throughout Java generally forced wage increases of between 30 and 50 per cent in 1920. While the militancy came from the skilled workers — compositors and printers — the rises they gained flowed on to lesser skilled binders and general hands in the industry. The variations among companies in the one city, not just on wages but also on hours of work, meal breaks and other conditions, caused a good deal of friction among workers. From the middle of 1919 calls were heard from workers and unions for the creation of uniform regulations in each city.[105] The success of the Semarang strike early in 1920 created uniform conditions in the printing industry in that city: a one and a half month strike in Solo, central Java, in September resulted in printing companies there also agreeing to better and uniform rates.[106] The victories in Semarang and Solo were further evidence that where skilled workers in one industry could be organized on a city-wide basis, gathering support from outside and preventing the recruitment of an alternative labour force, they could be successful.

UNREST IN SURABAYA

WHAT little manufacturing industry there was in the Indies was concentrated in Surabaya, with a number of small engineering companies and the government-owned Dry Dock Company being major employers of skilled labour. The social and economic grievances of Surabaya workers were no less than those of workers in Semarang, but whereas Semarang Sarekat Islam leaders were actively involved in organizing workers, their counterparts in Surabaya were considerably less active. This left an opening for a lone effort late in 1920 by a local man named Jahya, who used his extraordinary entrepreneurial and organizational skills to channel the grievances of Surabaya workers into a series of strikes.

Jahya was the son of a State Railways conductor at Jember, east Java. At just 23 years old in 1920, he was barely two years older than Semaun. He had graduated from the HIS school at Jember, literate in Dutch as well as Malay. After leaving school, he worked at a range of jobs until in 1920 becoming a full-time propagandist with the PFB, the union of sugar factory workers, in east Java. In the middle of the year he was dismissed, accused of misusing PFB funds. Jobs followed with the Postal Service and with a private company in Surabaya, neither of which lasted very long. Out of work, but with his PFB experience behind him, Jahya astutely realized that Surabaya workers lacked an organizer of Semaun's stature. He placed advertisements in the Surabaya Malay language press announcing that he was available to organize labour unions. Almost immediately, the Surabaya branch of the Printing Workers Union elected him as chairman.[107]

In September and October, Jahya busily organized a number of new Surabaya unions, including unions for dockworkers, metal industry workers, tailors and hotel workers. According to a detailed government investigation into the three months of turmoil in Surabaya, Jahya first extended his influence into workplaces by responding to approaches from workers for help in redressing their grievances. Jahya listened to their complaints, then sent them back into their workplaces to urge fellow workers to form themselves into a union. These people first approached the foremen: after some of the foremen were won over they then approached the skilled workers. If enough workers in a workplace showed interest, then Jahya organized a public meeting and started a branch of one of his unions. In October he brought all these unions together

into a local federation, the *Perserikatan Kaum Buruh* (Workers Association), of which he was chairman. In the three months of its existence, through to January 1921, it was estimated that the PKB received a total income of f1,000, from which it paid Jahya f140 per month and a smaller amount to a secretary. Jahya saw the PKB as the local equivalent of Semaun's PPKB, which was yet to extend its influence into Surabaya.[108]

In November and December 1920 there were major strikes in Surabaya printing, engineering and clothing industries. Jahya was deeply involved in them all, both as an organizer of unions and as a mediator between workers and employers. Although he was portrayed by government and employers as an extremist, whose tactic was to strike first and negotiate later, in fact, like Semaun, Jahya consistently tried to rein in worker militancy, counselling caution in the use of the strike weapon and urging compromise with employers. Most strikes broke out without Jahya's prior knowledge, but he was forced to throw his support behind them in order to maintain his standing with Surabaya workers. His public reputation of militancy was aided by barely concealed antagonism from PKI and Sarekat Islam leaders, who regarded him as a political maverick taking advantage of the lack of strong union leadership in Surabaya to further his own ends. This was at least partially true. Jahya did make a living out of his union activities, but then so did many others, including his strongest critics.

There were a number of small strikes among hotel workers late in October, but the first of the major strikes occurred in the printing industry early in November. While printing industry workers in Semarang had won significant improvements in wages and conditions as a result of their strike earlier in 1920, these gains had not flowed on to their counterparts in Surabaya, despite some companies having branches in both cities. Surabaya workers in the printing industry were aware of the gains made by their Semarang colleagues, but, until Jahya took over as its chairman, the *Typografenbond* lacked the strong leadership that Semaun provided in Semarang. As a full-time union organizer, Jahya had the time to listen to printing workers' grievances and marshall them to pressure employers.

The initiative for direct action, however, came from workers themselves, and once more it was the better paid skilled men who took the lead. In September, 106 compositors at the Surabaya printery of the large Van Dorp Company wrote to Jahya that they

had run out of patience and were no longer prepared to wait quietly for wage increases. They demanded a 50 per cent wage rise, an end to all arbitrary treatment, an 8 hour working day, free health care and medicine, a 3 months' bonus each year, a pension after twenty years service equal to 75 per cent of wages and three months' pay in lieu of notice of dismissal, nine festive days per year and fourteen days' annual holiday.[109] Similar demands were made by workers at one of the other large Surabaya printing companies, Fuhri and Company, where the frustration of workers was increased by the arbitrary dismissal of one of their number.

Within the *Typografenbond* Jahya argued strongly against a precipitate strike, urging first negotiations with the companies. He represented workers' demands to all the major printing companies, but to no avail. Nevertheless, at a well attended members' meeting on 10 November, he was still reluctant to agree to the demands of workers in Fuhri and Company for a strike. He cautioned that as workers had not contributed to the strike fund a strike would be hard on them and their families. Jahya's attempt to restrain printing workers was unsuccessful and the meeting decided to go ahead with an immediate strike. The following morning, 11 November, only a handful reported for work at Fuhri and Company, with almost all of the highly skilled compositors and printers staying at home. The night before, one of the less skilled workers had told the company manager that he and his friends did not dare come to work the following day because they had been threatened by compositors and printers. They were promised police protection. Many did indeed continue to work through the strike, with a police guard at the company gates giving them some reassurance.[110]

Surabaya printing companies were expecting major strikes and had agreed to maintain a common policy on the wages front. As in the earlier strikes in the Semarang printing industry, this united front did not last long. Demand was outstripping printing capacity in Java, with skilled compositors and printers in short supply. Fuhri and Company tried to get the support of other companies but found instead that a few had quickly acceded to some of their workers' demands. In the light of this, it decided that its best interests were served by meeting workers' demands and simply passing on the increased costs to customers. During the strike, which seems to have lasted a little over two weeks, it employed staff labour to do some of the jobs of strikers but was

unsuccessful in its attempt to recruit skilled labour from outside Surabaya. The striking workers agreed to accept a 35 per cent wage rise for higher paid skilled workers and a 20 per cent rise for others, together with an 8 hour working day and overtime provisions. The settlement reflected both the company's concern to retain its skilled workers and its realization that it was these skilled men who were the driving force behind the *Typografenbond*.[111]

Other printing companies in Surabaya adopted wages and conditions similar to those agreed to by Fuhri and Company, in some cases only after a short strike proved that workers were serious about their demands. The exception was the Van Dorp Company. Under instructions from head office, the Surabaya manager of Van Dorp adopted the same intransigent policy as the company's Semarang manager in February. Workers' requests on 10 December for a 50 per cent wage rise and an 8 hour day were preremptorily refused.[112] Instead, they were threatened that the printery would close down if there was a strike. On Saturday 11 December the manager learnt that his workers had decided to strike the following Monday. All were immediately dismissed and told that the printery would re-open when the manager saw fit; he would not under any circumstances concede their demands.[113] The intended strike now became a lock-out. Later that month, with workers showing no signs of giving in, the manager summoned his foremen, intending to demand that they pressure workers to return. He found, to his surprise, that the foremen were solidly behind them and refused to obey the summons. The company did not open its doors again until 24 January, but even then few workers returned because the manager agreed to do no more than consider a request for improved wages once work was underway.[114] It was not until the end of February that the company at last conceded all its workers' demands, introducing wages at the same level as every other printing company in Surabaya.[115]

Strikers were able to stay out as long as they did because such was the shortage of skilled workers in the printing industry that other companies were happy to employ them on a casual basis. Van Dorp saw its orders being filled by rival companies employing its own workers. Workers' realization of their power in this situation was evident at a meeting called by the *Typografenbond* early in February. The union chairman (by this time Jahya had been replaced) recommended a return to work because Van Dorp had agreed to three of their demands and was awaiting approval from

head office on the others. He was confident that they would also be accepted. Workers rejected this advice, with some arguing that if they eased the pressure on the company before all demands were agreed to it would renege; others proudly asserted that workers now had power and could stay on strike for another year if necessary.[116]

Workers in the engineering industry in Surabaya were less successful than those in the printing industry when they took direct action in November 1920. The strike began in the Dry Dock Company on 15 November when about 800 workers stayed away from the job. By 17 November the only men still at work were the European employees and about fifty Chinese artisans. Strikers demanded a 50 per cent wage rise plus an annual bonus of one month's wages and payment of wages in full when workers were sick.

There had been discontent in the Dry Dock Company for more than a year, with European employees agitating for improved wages and conditions and refusing to sign new contracts prepared by the company. European workers' discontent flowed over to Indonesian workers who were in a far worse position and whose grievances received far less attention from the company. Discontent among Indonesian workers increased when in mid-1920 the company paid all Europeans and Indonesian foremen one month's wages as a bonus to celebrate its tenth anniversary but gave the rest of the workforce a *slametan* (feast) only. Workers responded to this discrimination by sending a deputation to ask the manager for the same bonus: the first to complain were the clerks, followed closely by the skilled workers. While the manager acknowledged the reasonableness of their request, he had no authority to grant it. He did, however, promise to raise the matter with his directors in Holland.[117]

This unrest was exacerbated after the end of the sugar milling season in September 1920, a season that had been marked by widespread labour unrest in the sugar factories. Many factories in east Java had been badly affected by strikes, as we shall see, and responded by recruiting skilled labour from Surabaya. The skills of workers in Surabaya engineering companies were easily transferable to the inland sugar factories and many were attracted away from their homes for a few months by higher wages and bonuses. Surabaya engineering companies reported severe shortages of skilled labour during the 1920 sugar milling season (May to October)

and as late as November averaged less than 75 per cent of their normal skilled labour force.[118] The artisans who returned to their Surabaya jobs after a few months in the sugar factories brought back with them a heightened awareness of the value of their labour and a determination to exploit the skilled labour shortage in Surabaya to their advantage. Shop floor activists in Surabaya engineering companies in the final quarter of 1920 were often those skilled men who had experienced the higher wages offered by sugar factories and experienced also the tactics of the Union of Sugar Factory Workers, the PFB, even though, of course, they themselves had been strike breakers.[119]

There was, then, a strongly felt sense of injustice among Indonesian workers, particularly among skilled men, but with the foremen satisfied nothing came of it. In November the foremen themselves became angry because the company had begun to employ sixty Chinese artisans and foremen, imported from China owing to the shortage of local skilled labour, on higher wages than it paid Indonesians. Many proved unsuitable and were sent back to China, but they were replaced by Surabaya Chinese, also at the higher rates. When the Indonesian foremen complained, the company admitted that its Chinese workers were no better than its Indonesian ones but argued that because Chinese workers' living standards were higher they had to be paid more. Not surprisingly, the foremen were unimpressed, stating that as they performed the same work at the same standard they should be paid equally. They now demonstrated their power in the workplace by calling a sudden strike of 800 men on 15 November and drawing up a set of demands on the company which included a 50 per cent wage rise. Despite the fact that European workers stayed on the job, as did fifty Chinese workers, the workshop quickly came to a halt.[120]

Some of the company's workers were members of Jahya's labour federation, but most were not, and Jahya had not been consulted prior to the strike. Indeed, when the striking foremen went to see Jahya on the first morning of the strike, they were admonished for having taken direct action without prior consultation with him.[121] Discontent was not, however, confined to the Dry Dock Company, and as news of this strike and the continuing strike in the printing industry circulated through the kampungs, workers in other engineering companies were also encouraged to take direct action. On 22 November, 170 artisans in the foundry of the Brabat Engineering Company stopped work after the company

refused a 15 per cent wage rise requested by the foremen two weeks earlier.

That same evening, 22 November, an emergency meeting of the Surabaya Engineering Employers Association decided to begin a lock-out if strikers at the Brabat Engineering Company and the Dry Dock Company did not return to work by 29 November. The Employers Association, representing the twelve largest engineering companies in Surabaya, agreed not to raise wages nor to poach each other's skilled workers during the lock-out. This was an important agreement because of the general shortfall of skilled workers in the metal industries in Surabaya and because companies had previously been willing to take advantage of a strike elsewhere. The larger companies, in particular, found it difficult to retain skilled workers who were recruited by smaller and newer companies with offers of better wages.[122]

The Employers Association threat was immediately publicized in the workplaces, but instead of having an intimidatory effect on workers, seems to have aroused to action workers in so-far unaffected companies. At a meeting of 150 workers from six engineering companies on 26 November, the foremen argued that if the workshops were closed they would not return to work. At a public meeting organized by Jahya on Sunday morning, 28 November, just one day before the lock-out was due to begin, strikers refused to listen to Jahya's pleas for moderation.[123] The meeting itself demonstrated Jahya's organizational and oratory skills but, more importantly, demonstrated that the impetus for the strikes came from workers themselves who listened more to their foremen than to outside union leaders.

Surabaya union leaders had met the day before the meeting and decided that Jahya should speak in a spirit of compromise and in no way further encourage strikes. About 5,000 workers packed into a central park. With squads of police carefully watching, the meeting opened with the playing of the Wilhelmus, the Netherlands national anthem. While it may have caused many nationalists present to grate their teeth, it was clearly intended to signal to the government that Surabaya workers were engaged in an economic struggle not in political activity. A well-known Surabaya religious teacher, *Kiyayi* Mansur, led the crowd in prayers — an unusual occurrence at meetings of urban workers but one no doubt calculated to add the sanction of religion to worker militancy. Jahya then took over, modestly stating that the great crowd

present was not a tribute to him personally but to workers' determination to organize themselves and to struggle for their rights. He was merely the intermediary who negotiated for them and showed them the way to freedom: if he was arrested others would come forward to lead them. Jahya then explained how the strike had occurred and how he had tried to negotiate with the companies but had been rebuffed. He then told the crowd that he would try again to negotiate with employers through the mediation of the Assistant Resident. With a sense of the dramatic, he then excused himself from the meeting in order to go immediately to the Assistant Resident. A short time later he returned and triumphantly told the assembled crowd that he had managed to organize a meeting with employers later that day.[124]

The meeting that afternoon between Jahya, the chairman of the Engineering Employers Association and the Assistant Resident of Surabaya achieved nothing. When strikers did not return to work on 29 November the Association proclaimed a lock-out in all the privately owned engineering companies in the city. The lock-out was to last for one week, but if by 6 December at least 80 per cent of the workforce had not returned to work it would continue indefinitely. Jahya held another meeting with strikers on the morning of 30 November to report on his unsuccessful negotiations. When he asked them what they now wanted to do, the answer came back in a great wave: 'terus mogok' (continue striking).[125] Few workers showed up on 6 December and the lock-out was extended for another week.

The lock-out put about 6,000 workers in the engineering industry out of a job. In order to collect money and give assistance to workers and families of strikers in need, a *Comite Kemanusiaan* (Welfare Committee) was established under the leadership of Tan Ping Tjiat, the administrator of the east Java edition of *Sin Po*, PKI member and sometime chairman of the Chinese Workers Association (Tiong Hwa King Kie Hwee), and Pangestu, the Surabaya chairman of the VSTP. Various methods were used to raise money and rice, including printing and distributing donation cards for circulation in the kampungs, arranging for other voluntary bodies, such as football clubs and cultural associations, to raise money through special performances and soliciting gifts from wealthier members of the Surabaya community.[126]

The Welfare Committee joined Jahya in mediating between workers and employers. It was acutely aware of the hardships the

lock-out was bringing to workers' families, and, in the face of employer intransigence, decided after two weeks that workers could not hold out much longer. At a meeting of some 400 men on Saturday 11 December, Tan Ping Tjiat, Pangestu and Jahya all urged a return to work the following Monday, in the hope that employers would end their lock-out and begin negotiations with them. A *kiyayi*, brought especially from Yogyakarta for the meeting, urged workers to return to work for the sake of their wives and children. While workers may have been concerned about their wives and children, they were still determined to obtain some improvements from their employers. In response to pressure from some workers, the meeting decided that they would work as usual on the Monday but only if the companies gave a written undertaking not to employ lock-outs against them again and agreed to pay half-wages for the fourteen days they had been without work.[127]

A large part of the 6,000 workforce returned to work on Monday 13 December, but demanded concessions from employers before actually starting work. Most employers were faced with demands for a written undertaking that lock-outs would never again be imposed: workers at one company refused to move inside the factory gates until this undertaking was made. Employers hurriedly convened in the Simpang Club, the European oasis in Surabaya, but scenting victory refused to give any undertaking and extended the lock-out for another week.[128] Although it was a busy time of the year for the engineering companies, with contracts to be filled for the sugar factories before the new season began in May, they probably reasoned that it was better to have a prolonged strike now than to risk further unrest in the new year when contract deadlines would be looming.

The companies decided to open their doors on 20 December and to recruit labour from elsewhere where possible. The Dry Dock Company was helped in this by a Madurese foreman at the Kalimas Boat Company, a man named Mat, who recruited 170 Madurese workers. Mat was personally antagonistic to Jahya because Jahya had led an unsuccessful strike in November by the Madurese seamen working on the boats of the Kalimas Boat Company. The company had broken the strike by replacing the Madurese workers with Buginese and Minahassans on higher wages. Jahya had then publicly argued that the Madurese should seek other work and not be discontented because the workers had won an important victory in that the Buginese and Minahassans

were being paid higher wages.[129] The Dry Dock Company's success in exploiting ethnic differences among workers illustrated yet again the ethnic and regional differences among urban workers in Java which made it difficult for union leaders to create worker solidarity during strikes. The use of Chinese as strike breakers was common, as was the employment of non-Javanese or the recruitment of Javanese from another town or region when Javanese workers went on strike.

Slowly workers returned to their jobs on employers' terms, with the older workers turning up for work earliest and the younger men, with fewer family responsibilities, the slowest to acknowledge defeat. By the end of January the companies were working normally.[130]

While workers in the Surabaya engineering companies were defeated by their employers, direct action launched at the same time by workers in the clothing industry was more successful. A *Kleermakersbond* (Tailors Union) had been established by Jahya early in October and had quickly attracted large numbers of workers in the Surabaya clothing industry. The predominantly European-owned clothing industry operated on a piece-work system, either employing workers directly in small factories or sending the work out into the kampungs. The piece-work rates were little better in 1920 than they had been in 1914, despite inflation, though rates varied from employer to employer. The major demand of workers in the clothing industry late in 1920 was for conversion of piece-work rates into fixed hourly rates. Meetings of the Tailors Union in October and November reverberated to this demand.[131]

Early in November the Tailors Union decided to pressure one clothing firm, Sevelkoul, into replacing piece-work rates by daily wages. This firm was chosen as a test case because its manager was also the chairman of the *Algemeene Bond van Winkeliers* (General Association of Shopkeepers) in Surabaya. The manager responded, predictably enough, by calling a meeting of the Association at which employers agreed that if a strike broke out at any one firm they would respond by an industry-wide lock-out. The Association had been very critical of the printing companies in Surabaya for not maintaining a united front against their workforce and was determined to stand firm against their own employees.[132] Nevertheless, in recognition that workers' demands for better wages were justified, it did create a new and uniform wage list set at the

best rates then paid in Surabaya. But it refused to introduce day wages, arguing that productivity would drop if there was no incentive for people to work hard.

On 17 November workers at one company stayed away from work. Immediately, all employers proclaimed a lock-out.[133] On the initiative of the Assistant Resident of Surabaya, a meeting was held between representatives of the workers and the companies on 20 December. The workers were represented by Jahya, president of the Tailors Union, and Tan Ping Tjiat, chairman of the Welfare Committee. Jahya is reported to have stuck to the demand for fixed wages, while the chairman of the Employers Association offered to introduce weekly wages, subject to deductions if a predetermined quota was not achieved and a bonus if it was surpassed. Workers would be free to work either at home or in the workshops and, if sick, on the production of a medical certificate would be paid the minimum wage. Jahya promised to take these proposals back to the tailors, but two days later informed the Association that workers maintained their demand for a weekly wage and would not agree to the introduction of a quota.[134]

The dispute dragged on into December, with employers determined to hold firm, convinced that Jahya was the instigator of worker unrest and that his influence was steadily declining among Surabaya workers as it became clear that the engineering industry lock-out was going to defeat its workers. There was some discussion early in December about the possibility of recruiting Chinese workers from Singapore, but in the main employers relied on starving workers back on their terms.[135] On 27 December, forty days after the lock-out was imposed, the clothing companies opened their doors once more, with only partial success. However, by the end of December employers were able to place piece-work out into the kampungs and by early January workers began to drift back to the workshops. Most opted for the improved piece-work rates, which now included provision for sickness benefits.[136] While the tailors had received far from all they had demanded, their new conditions were a considerable improvement on those prevailing before the lock-out.

By the end of December Jahya's role as labour organizer in Surabaya was over. The sense of injustice among large sections of the city's skilled workers had been mounting for some time, fuelled by the post-war inflation and the tardiness of employers in compensating for it. Jahya had seized his opportunity to channel this

discontent into labour unions. In the last quarter of 1920 he raised Surabaya workers' expectations, not so much by concrete promises but by his enthusiastic promotion of the benefits of solidarity and organization. The strikes did not occur at Jahya's direct instigation, but his energetic promotion of workers' interests and his personal charisma clearly encouraged workers to give vent to their grievances. When employers responded with lock-outs, which took their toll of workers and their families, workers turned against Jahya just as suddenly as they had flocked to him, blaming him for their predicament. The Printing Workers Union dismissed him as chairman in December, the Tailors Union dismissed him in mid-January and the *Perserikatan Kaum Buruh* collapsed as workers simply stopped paying their dues. Jahya's involvement with urban workers was far from over, but for the moment he retreated from union organization, with his opponents in Sarekat Islam and the PKI glad to see his demise.

UNION DIVERSITY

WHILE the focus has been on the major labour unions and on labour conflicts in the two cities of Semarang and Surabaya, organization of workers was occurring on a far wider scale. In 1919 a *Havenarbeidersbond* (Harbour Workers Union) was established in Semarang under Semaun's leadership. It quickly established branches in the major ports along the northern Java coast, with the notable exception of Surabaya where it failed to find local leaders to form a branch. The Harbour Workers Union enrolled only a small percentage of harbour workers, finding considerable difficulty in persuading the circular migrants who composed the bulk of them of the advantages of union membership. Nevertheless, the mere existence of a harbour workers' union under communist central leadership confirmed the conviction of employers and government that otherwise contented workers were being stirred up by outside agitators. In reality, the unions were more spectators than instigators of strikes, although, of course, when strikes broke out they did publicly and vociferously support them and did try to bring them under their control.[137]

Chauffeurs, hotel workers, workers in the petroleum industry, the opium factory in Batavia, the Post and Telegraph offices and in a multitude of other areas were also drawn into labour unions in the immediate post-war years. Most of these unions were

very small and the commitment of members was even more marginal than in the larger unions. Isolated strikes occurred in many of these industries, though again rarely was the union involved until workers themselves took the initiative to walk off the job.

The post-war inflation not only caused many thousands of ordinary urban workers to try to improve their lot by direct action, but also increased the irritation of better educated workers at the racial inequalities in the colony. When the Semarang chairman of the *Postbond*, the predominantly European postal workers union, defended higher wages for Europeans in 1919 on the grounds that their housing, food, clothing and other needs were more expensive, he was expressing the generally held European view. That he needed publicly to defend the differential was in itself a sign of the growing vocal opposition from increasing numbers of Indonesian workers. The Indonesian postal workers union poured scorn on his argument:

> Remember Europeans. Natives wash in stagnant water, eat only *ontjom*, salty fish and sambal, and live in houses which are like pigpens, not because they do not want better but because they are forced to live this way owing to wages too high to starve on but too low to live on. And we do not want to live like Europeans!.[138]

Clearly, it was not just well-educated Indonesians who were refusing any longer passively to accept wage structures based predominantly on race. Skilled tradesmen, foremen and overseers were adding their voices to the protest and supporting their words with strikes. The consciousness of large sections of the urban workforce was changing rapidly, in ways which were directly challenging European domination.

The labour movement had grown remarkably quickly, but by the middle of 1921 there were signs of disharmony which not only reflected ideological differences but also differences of rank and status. The split within the labour federation along ideological lines will be discussed later, but there were also significant splits within two of the oldest and largest unions, the Pawnshop Workers Union and the Teachers Union. During 1920 the Indonesian managers and deputy managers broke away from the PPPB to form their own organization, the *Perserikatan Beheerders en Onderbeheerders di Hindia* (Association of Managers and Deputy Managers in the Indies — PBOH), arguing that the PPPB served

the interests of lower level pawnshop workers only. The immediate cause seems to have been that lower level pawnshop workers had received wage rises in 1920, as a result of the PPPB campaign, but Indonesian managers and deputy managers had not.[139] The deeper cause was the strong sense of status and rank among those few Indonesian pawnshop workers who had attained managerial level. They identified themselves with the European managers even though the salary differential between European and Indonesian managers was considerable. While the PBOH was critical of PPPB calls for strikes, for its part the PPPB contemptuously dismissed the PBOH as merely the tool of European management.[140] The PPPB view of the PBOH was strengthened when the European *Pandhuisbond* decided to cooperate with it but to continue to oppose the PPPB.[141] Even though the PBOH was only a small union (at the end of 1920 it had no more than fifty members),[142] the establishment of the new union was a clear reminder that divisions of rank and status within the Indonesian workforce were just as important as the division between Indonesian and European.

A similar split occurred within the teachers union, the PGHB, though this time it was the less qualified workers who broke away. Since 1916 there had been discontent within the PGHB from the lower paid and less qualified assistant teachers, who felt that the union was ignoring their interests. In 1919 the government decided to increase wages for the higher qualified teachers but to leave unchanged the wages of assistant teachers. This was the final straw for assistant teachers and early in 1919 a *Gurubantubond* (Assistant Teachers Union) was established in Semarang to promote their views. A short time earlier a *Kweekschoolbond* (Teachers Training College Union) had been established. As with the pawnshop workers, divisions between different grades of teachers were very strong, preventing the PGHB from being more than a federation of individual teachers unions. Once again the appeal to worker solidarity had broken down in the face of differences of rank and status.

CONCLUSION

MOST employers conceded significant wage increases between 1918 and 1920 because they considered it more advantageous to pay higher wages than to have protracted labour disputes at a time

when the economy was buoyant and profits high. The labour disputes were caused by workers' experience of the severe impact of inflation on their daily lives. The post-war economic boom was over by the middle of 1921 and with it the preparedness of government and employers to compromise with workers' demands. Economies were gradually introduced by private and public employers, which threatened many of the previous gains. Labour unions had flourished during the boom; now they were faced with the much harder task of defending workers against better organized employers and a less sympathetic government.

The labour conflicts in the cities of Java between 1918 and the middle of 1921 demonstrated that workers' discontent with their lot was widespread. Almost without exception, the pressure for direct action came from below, with labour union leaders responding to rather than initiating it. Indeed, union leaders were generally far more cautious than workers themselves, aware of the organizational and financial weaknesses of their unions and aware also that in a colonial society the strike weapon could so easily rebound against them. Unions were a long way from solving their basic problems of organization, discipline and local leadership. Even the VSTP, by far the best organized, was having problems at the local level. Symptomatic of this was its report late in 1920 that the treasurer of its Purwokerto branch had stolen union funds for the second time. The first time he had been admonished but forgiven: the second time the matter was put into the hands of the police who arrested and charged him.[143] The success of most of the strikes in the immediate post-war years reflected not the strong organization of labour unions but the buoyant economic conditions, the capacity of industry to pay, the shortage of skilled labour and, most importantly, employers' lack of organization and government neutrality. All of these conditions changed with the onset of the recession, making it far more difficult for unions to survive.

1. Source: W.M.F. Mansvelt and P. Creutsberg, op. cit., Vol 4, Rice Prices, Table 1, pp. 45-6. For a discussion of the bases of these indices, see pp. 10 and 39-42.
2. W. A. Oates, 'The Afdeeling B: An Indonesian case study', *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 9, 1 (1968), pp. 107-16.
3. See, 'Report on the Influenza Epidemic in Netherlands-India 1918', *Mededeelingen van den Burgelijken Geneeskundigendienst*, Part 10, 1920, pp. 78-157.

4. For a recent discussion of Sarekat Islam in its formative period see, Korver, op. cit.
5. See, for example, Semaun's view in 1917 that until the colonial government was removed there would be no real protection for workers. Until then they would have to strike, at great sacrifice to themselves and their families, in order to protect their livelihood. Semaun, 'Nasibnja kaum buruh di Hindia Belanda' *Sinar Djawa*, 19 January 1917.
6. Noer, op. cit., p. 120.
7. Sosrokardono, 'Pergerakan Buruh', *Oetoesan Hindia*, 1 April 1919, in *IPO* 4 (1919), pp. 30-1.
8. Chief Representative to Directors, 13 January 1917, Sister Societies Common Archives, 720-1.
9. See, *Volharding*, 20 November 1917, 20 April and 20 May 1918.
10. *Volharding*, 5 and 20 February 1918.
11. *Locomotief*, 13 February 1918.
12. *Volharding*, 20 May 1918.
13. 'Nota omtrent de revolutionnair-socialistische actie hier te land', 29 May 1918, Political Intelligence Service, Secret Report No 41 of 1918, V 6 January 1919–16.
14. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 7, 9 and 14 February 1918; *Locomotief*, 5 February 1918.
15. *Locomotief*, 16, 18 and 25 March 1918.
16. *Het Vrije Woord*, 10 January 1918.
17. 'Nota omtrent de revolutionnair-socialistische actie hier te lande', op. cit., p. 17.
18. Ibid., pp. 14-18; *Sinar Djawa*, 25 and 27 April 1918; *Locomotief*, 11 April 1918, and Political Intelligence Service, Secret Report, No. 48 of 1918, enclosed in V 7 May 1919–55.
19. The article of Darsono was entitled 'Kudus', and published in *Sin Po*, 21 November 1921.
20. 'Sedikit Perkatahan boeat Toean Darsono', *Sin Po*, 21 November 1921, reprinted in L. Suryadinata (ed.), *Political Thinking of the Indonesian Chinese 1900–1977* (Singapore, 1979), pp. 10-16.
21. *Locomotief*, 27 May and 24 June 1918; Political Intelligence Service, Secret Report, No. 48 of 30 May 1918, enclosed in V 7 May 1919–55.
22. This strike is covered in detail in *Locomotief*, 5, 7, 19, 25, 27, 28, 29 November and 2, 10 December 1918.
23. See, Ingleson, 'Life and Work', op. cit.
24. Ostmeier, op. cit.
25. *Sinar Djawa*, 27 April 1918.
26. *De Schatter*, 15 January 1918, citing a report from the *Nieuwe Soerabaia Courant*.
27. *Locomotief*, 2 January 1918.
28. *Locomotief*, 10 January 1918.
29. *De Schatter*, 15 March 1918.
30. 'Mijmeingen', *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, 1 November 1919.
31. *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, 15 February 1919.
32. Circular No. 23959/40, 19 October 1918, by the Head of the Pawnshop Service, enclosed in V 7 October 1920–88.

33. Circular No. 16416/18, 27 June 1919, by the Head of the Pawnshop Service, in V 7 October 1920–88.
34. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 15 May 1919, in *IPO* 20 (1919), pp. 26–7.
A strike broke out at the Ulujambi pawnshop in Pemalang in May 1919 when, according to a newspaper report, the manager, after discovering a mistake, threatened workers with fines, dismissals and being put in a convict chain gang. The Regent, *wedana* and police had to come to the pawnshop to calm workers down and persuade them to go back to work. *Neratja*, 26 May 1919, in *IPO* 22 (1919), pp. 1-2.
35. Head of the Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 23 January 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/471.
36. 'De Pandhuis Kwestie', *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, 15 February 1919.
37. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 15 January 1919, in *IPO* 3 (1919), pp. 21-2.
38. 'De Pandhuis Kwestie', op. cit.
39. *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, 31 January 1919; *Neratja*, 10 January 1919, in *IPO* 1 (1919), p. 2.
40. *Sinar Hindia*, 20 January 1919.
41. *Sinar Hindia*, 15 May 1919.
42. *Sinar Hindia*, 23 June 1919.
43. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 7 July 1919, in *IPO* 28 (1919), p. 18.
44. Reprinted in *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, June 1919.
45. Circular, Head of Pawnshop Service to Managers, 23 June 1919, V 30 June 1923–30.
46. *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, 1 November 1919.
47. Report of Inspector Bloch to the Head of the Pawnshop Service, 7 March 1920, V 19 June 1923–10.
48. *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, 1 November 1919.
49. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 13 March 1920.
50. Head of Pawnshop Service to Inspector of Pawnshop Service, 15 March 1920, V 19 June 1923–10.
51. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 27 July 1920.
Red rice was indigenous rice, cheaper than white rice and, although having the same food value, considered less palatable and less socially desirable by urban Indonesians.
52. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 2 June 1920.
53. *Soeara Boemipoetra*, June 1920, in *IPO* 25 (1920), p.1.
54. *Soeara Boemipoetra*, 15 August 1920, in *IPO* 37 (1920), p. 1.
55. Quoted in *Locomotief*, 13 January 1922.
56. For biographical details on Bergsma see: McVey, op. cit, and Interrogation of Pieter Bergsma, 13 February 1922, enclosed in V 29 April 1922–G4.
57. See, Official Report of the Interrogation of PKI Suspects in Semarang, enclosed in Governor of Semarang to Governor-General, 22 December 1926, V 1 July 1927–T10.
58. Central Executive VSTP to Directors of Societies, 2 January 1920, Sister Societies Common Archives, 743-II.
59. *Volharding*, 25 December 1919.

60. e.g. *Volharding*, 25 December 1919.
61. *Volharding*, 10 June 1920; *Oetoesan Hindia*, 22 and 23 April 1920.
62. Head of Exploitation SCS to Chief Representative, 26 August 1920, SCS Archives, Box 42, Dossier 745-1; *Volharding*, 10 August 1920.
63. See, Chief Representative to Directors, 19 August 1920, 340/43P Secret, SCS Archives, Box 42, Dossier 745-II.
64. The demands are enclosed in Head of Exploitation to Chief Representative, 26 August 1920, SCS Archives, Box 42, Dossier 745-I.
65. 'Collection of the detective reports received from Semarang', enclosed in Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 27 May 1921, V 19 July 1921–Y7.
66. Enclosure in, Head of Exploitation to Chief Representative, 26 August 1920, SCS Archives, Box 42, Dossier 745-I.
    Just after the outbreak of the strike the SCS tacitly acknowledged the justice of workers' complaints when it introduced overtime payments for work after 8 p.m., backdated to 1 July. See Head of Exploitation to Heads of 2nd, 3rd and 4th Departments, Tegal, 14 August 1920, SCS Archives, Box 42, Dossier 745-I.
67. Secret Report, Semarang, 25 September 1920, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 30 September 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1095.
68. *Locomotief*, 7 October 1920.
69. *Locomotief*, 6, 7, 8 and 9 October 1920.
70. *Sinar Hindia*, 14 October 1920; *Locomotief*, 9 October 1920.
71. Telegrams, Resident of Cirebon to Governor-General, 6 October 1920, Resident of Cirebon to Governor-General, 7 October 1920, Resident of Pekalongan to Governor-General, 8 October 1920, Resident of Cirebon to Governor-General, 9 October 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1126; 'Discussions between the Chief Representative and Bergsma and Semaun,' 8 October 1920, and 'Discussions between the Chief Representative and Semaun', 7 October 1920, SCS Archives, Box 42, Dossier 745-I.
72. The Demands adopted by the December Congress are enclosed in VSTP Central Executive to Management Committee NIS, 12 July 1921, NIS Archives, Box 4, Dossier 4.
73. VSTP Central Executive to Management Committee NIS, 12 July 1921, NIS Archives, Box 4, Dossier 4.
74. *Volharding*, 25 May 1919.
75. *Volharding*, 5 November 1918.
76. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 24 August 1920.
77. *Si Tetap*, 30 June 1921, in *IPO* 30b (1921), pp. 200-1.
78. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 16 June 1921; *Volharding*, June 1921; *Si Tetap*, ibid.
79. The VSTP central executive constantly berated branch executives for failing to extract membership fees on a regular basis. In December 1921, for example, less than 30 per cent of members paid their monthly dues. *Volharding*, February 1922.
80. *Si Tetap*, 31 January 1921, in *IPO* 8 (1921), p. 31.
81. *Het Vrije Woord*, 10 November 1915.
82. *Keras-Hati*, 15 July 1918.
83. *Volharding*, 25 May 1919; *Sinar Hindia*, 31 July 1920.

84. *Kaoem Moeda*, 21 July 1919, in *IPO* 30 (1919), pp. 7-8.
85. See Semaun's parting article before he went to jail: 'Tot Wederziens', *Volharding*, 25 July 1919.
86. For a detailed list of unions represented and their individual membership see, *Soeara Bekelai*, 29 February 1920.
    A detailed report on the meeting is contained in 'Report on the Fourth National Congress of the Central Sarekat Islam in Surabaya from 26 October to 2 November 1919, in V 4 January 1922–H.
87. *Verslag CSI*, p. 16.
88. *Verslag CSI*, p. 6.
89. See detailed reports in: *Sinar Hindia*, 31 July 1920 and Head of the General Detective Service to Attorney-General, 6 January 1920, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 8 January 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/105. See also, McVey, op. cit., pp. 44-5.
90. See *Verslag CSI*, pp. 6-22.
91. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 17 June 1919, in *IPO* 25 (1919), p. 26.
92. *Sinar Hindia*, 9 February 1920; Attorney-General to Governor-General, 26 April 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/472.
93. *Sinar Hindia*, 9 February 1920.
94. Series of questions and answers concerning the printers' strike at Van Dorp, Semarang (prepared by the Assistant Resident of Semarang) and enclosed in 'Notes of the Meeting at the Rijswijk Palace on Monday 8 March 1920,' Secret Mail Report 1920/409.
95. *Sinar Hindia*, 9 February and 17 February 1920.
96. Quoted in Assistant Resident of Semarang to Attorney-General, 5 March 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/472.
97. The above paragraphs are based on an article written by Semaun, 'Vakcentrale PPKB ada di dalem bahaja', *Soeara Bekelai*, 29 February 1920.
98. See *Soeara Bekelai*, 30 April 1920.
99. *Soeara Bekelai*, 30 April 1920.
100. Verbal Interrogation of a Suspect, Secret Mail Report 1920/472.
101. Assistant Resident of Semarang to Attorney-General, 13 April 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/472; *Sinar Hindia*, 14 April 1920.
102. See *Soeara Bekelai*, 30 March, 30 April and 31 July 1920.
103. See, for example, information on a strike in Tegal in June 1920, *Oetoesan Hindia*, 17 July 1920, in Pekalongan in June 1920, *Sinar Hindia*, 12 June 1920; in Batavia in November 1920, *Sinar Hindia*, 6 November 1920; and in Surabaya in June 1919, *Oetoesan Hindia*, 26 June 1919, in *IPO* 26 (1919), p. 25.
104. *Sinar Hindia*, 12 June 1920.
105. See, for example, *Neratja*, 24 June 1919, in *IPO* 26 (1919), pp. 4-5.
106. *Sinar Hindia*, 29 September, 5 and 12 October 1920.
107. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff, 10 February 1921, on labour disputes at Surabaya in November–December 1920', Secret Mail Report 1921/253, part 1, p. 1.
108. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 1, pp. 2-4.
109. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 3, p. 1.
110. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff' part 3, pp. 2-6; *Oetoesan Hindia*, 16 November 1920.
111. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 3, pp. 6-13.

112. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 3, pp. 7-9, *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 20 January 1921.
113. *Locomotief*, 15 December 1920.
114. *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 20 and 25 January 1921.
115. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 3; *Oetoesan Hindia*, 2 February 1921.
116. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 7 February 1921.
117. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 4, pp. 1-4.
118. See: *N.V. Machinefabriek Braat te Soerabaja, Verslag over het Tiende Boekjaar 1919–1920*, p. 4, and *Verslag over het Elfde Boekjaar 1920–1921*, pp. 6-8.
119. *Verslag over het Elfde Boekjaar 1920–1921*, loc. cit.
120. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 4, pp. 4-5.
121. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 4, p. 5.
122. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 4, pp. 5-9.
123. *Locomotief*, 29 November 1920.
124. *Locomotief*, 29 November 1920.
125. *Locomotief*, 30 November 1920.
126. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 11 June 1923. For biographical details on Tan Ping Tjiat see, Resident of Surabaya to Attorney-General, 20 December 1926, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 12 January 1927, V 21 June 1927–A10.
127. *Locomotief*, 14 December 1920; 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 4, pp. 12-13.
128. *Locomotief*, 14 December 1920.
129. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 4, pp. 13-14.
130. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 4, p. 15.
131. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 2, p. 2
132. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 2, p. 2.
133. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 2; p. 2; *Locomotief*, 17 November 1920.
134. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 2, p. 9.
135. *Locomotief*, 7 December 1920.
136. 'Report by J. J. Viehoff', part 2, pp. 9-16.
137. See, Ingleson, 'Life and Work' op. cit.
138. *Soeara Postel*, 15 June 1919.
139. *Soeara Boemipoetra*, 1 October 1920, quoted in *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, Oct–Nov–Dec 1920.
140. *Sinar Hindia*, 4 and 13 November 1920.
141. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 20 April 1921, in *IPO* 17 (1921), p. 186.
142. *Soeara PBOH*, 29 December 1920–21 January 1921, in *IPO* 11 (1921), p. 38.
143. *Si Tetap*, October–December 1920, in *IPO* 1 (1921), p. 41.

IV
Conflict in the Sugar Factories

THE sugar industry was the backbone of the Indies economy and the catalyst for the development of roads, railways, ports and the general infrastructure of the colony in the nineteenth century. By the 1910s there were around two hundred sugar factories scattered throughout the hinterland of Java, concentrated in the major sugar growing areas of central and east Java. The factories milled and partly processed the sugar cane before sending it to the ports for export. The industry was extremely prosperous — at least for its Dutch shareholders if not for the millions of Javanese who came to depend upon it for a livelihood. It was dominated by a small group of large companies each of which operated a number of factories and the largest of which also had extensive plantation and other interests in the colony. Organized into the Sugar Syndicate, based in Surabaya, the major sugar interests had enormous political influence on the colonial government. No Governor-General could ignore the Syndicate for very long.

Most of the sugar factories were located close to towns. Workers in the factories had access to the towns and to the intellectual and political ferment taking place in them in the 1910s. Indeed, many skilled workers had experienced both working in a coastal city such as Surabaya or in an inland town such as Madiun as well as working in a sugar factory in the hinterland. Many of the unskilled workers also had access to the urban areas, probably alternating between work in the sugar factories and wage labour in a nearby town or city. In the urban areas they lived in kampungs alongside urban workers who in the 1910s were involved in strikes or lock-outs or who were members of Sarekat Islam, with the

result that they too were influenced by the ideas espoused by the nationalist parties, the labour unions and the Malay language press.

The inflation that swept through the Indies in the immediate post-war years affected workers in the rural sugar factories as much as workers in the towns and cities. Not suprisingly, therefore, it drew a similar response. In 1919 and 1920 labour unrest in the factories shook both management and government into a major reconsideration of wages and conditions. The *Personeel Fabrieksbond* (Factory Workers Union — PFB) was the only union of any size to operate outside the towns and cities and was an important part of the early development of labour unions in Java. Its sudden rise to prominence in 1918 was followed by an equally sudden demise in 1921. For three short years it forced employers and government to listen to the accumulated grievances of sugar factory workers.

THE SUGAR FACTORY WORKFORCE

MOST of the workers who led the strikes to improve wages and conditions were almost totally dependent on the sugar factories for their livelihood. They were part of the one third of those employed in and around the sugar factories who were permanent employees.[1] Although some of these permanent workers owned village land they had for the most part broken their direct connection with the land. Increasingly, they lived in company-owned kampungs in the vicinity of the factories. In 1919 about half of the sugar factories had their own kampungs while by 1928 this had grown to over two-thirds.[2] Given that in 1928 the average number of permanent workers at each sugar factory was around 275-320,[3] the factory kampungs would have been communities of between one and two thousand people. There was a strong sense of community in the sugar factory kampungs. While proximity assisted in mobilization, at the same time residence in company-owned housing made workers vulnerable to management pressure. These permanent factory workers had far more in common with urban workers than with the villagers recruited for casual work during the annual milling season. Subject to the same dependency on wages and affected by inflation to the same extent, their industrial activity closely paralleled that of urban workers.

The permanent workers were the best paid workers in the

sugar factories. About one-third were classed as cultivation or transport workers, about 48 per cent as skilled artisans and the rest as administrative workers, laboratory technicians or labourers. A survey of the industry in 1928 revealed that only 1.24 per cent had any kind of formal education and most of these were administrative workers.[4] Very few then could read, let alone write, in Malay, Javanese, or any other regional language, which increased the difficulties for union leaders trying to educate members on the broader goals of labour unions.

The largest and most important group of permanent workers was the artisans (*tukang*). They were initially recruited from areas around the factories, but gradually accepted practice was for new artisans to be employed by a factory only on the nomination of existing artisans. New recruits began as helpers or assistant artisans, doing much of the dirty work while learning the skills of the job. The close bonds between artisans, especially between older and younger men, were often strengthened by direct family ties. Family and dependency ties, together with the close community bonds in the kampungs, help explain why artisans joined the PFB in a flood in 1919 and 1920 and why they also abandoned the union as a group in 1921.

Nearly one-third of the permanent workforce was classed as foremen, whose job was to supervise work in and around the factories and to serve as middlemen between European supervisors and Indonesian workers. They were regarded as trusted men by factory managers and as spokesmen for their workers. Some foremen joined the PFB and became valuable local leaders, but the majority seem to have stayed aloof from the union, with many actually siding with managers and recruiting strike-breakers during disputes. Factory foremen were at first chosen from the most able artisans but gradually assumed hereditary rights. While foremen did not recruit artisans, they did control the allocation of jobs within the factories and had the power to impose fines for misdemeanours or bad workmanship. Moreover, it was foremen who recruited much of the casual labour which made up two-thirds of the workforce during the milling season, from May to September each year. Foremen had considerable formal as well as informal power both inside the factories and outside in the factory kampungs as well as in the villages from which the factories recruited seasonal labour.

Seasonal workers were generally recruited from villages

within walking distance of the factories. Most came from the poorest strata of village society, forced to seek additional income outside the village because they had little or no land and could obtain insufficient work within the village.[5] Wage rates for seasonal workers varied from factory to factory. Those situated in areas where labour was plentiful paid less than those situated in areas where there were alternative avenues of employment. In general, unskilled casual workers were paid day-wages between a half and a third of the rates paid to artisans. In some factories labour contracts were verbal ones, but in most they were written, being read out to illiterate workers before each placed his fingerprint on them. It is clear from the strike wave between 1919 and 1921 that most factory workers had little idea of the contents of these contracts, with managers making little or no effort to explain their provisions but being quick to impose fines when they were transgressed.

ORIGINS OF UNIONIZATION

In April 1917 a welfare organization called *Adidarmo* (Army of Labour) was formed in Yogyakarta. Its founder was Raden Mas Surjopranoto, a member of a lesser branch of the Yogyakarta royal house of Paku Alam and the elder brother of Suardi Surjaningrat, the exiled leader of the Indische Partij who later, as Ki Hadjar Dewantoro, founded the Taman Siswa school movement. During 1917 and 1918 *Adidarmo* established polyclinics, orphanages, old people's homes and village banks and provided legal help to those in need. A particular concern was the welfare of sugar factory workers in the Yogyakarta area. It supplied relief to those who lost their jobs and aid to the families of those who died.[6] Surjopranoto had for some years been a prominent member of the Central Sarekat Islam (CSI), based in Yogyakarta, and had travelled extensively throughout Java promoting that party. While the *Adidarmo* was not formally connected with Sarekat Islam, all of its leaders were active CSI members.

In August 1918 the *Adidarmo* spawned three labour unions, organizationally separate from the parent body. These were *Perserikatan Kaum Buruh* (Workers Association), *Perserikatan Tani dan Coöoperatie* (Farmers Association) and *Personeel Fabriksbond* (Factory Workers Union).[7] Since 1917 the Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam had operated a labour union department and

under Semaun's leadership had organized unions in that city. Much of the vitality of the Semarang Sarekat Islam stemmed from its involvement with workers. In the competition between Semarang and Yogyakarta for overall leadership of Sarekat Islam, Surjopranoto was keen to follow Semaun's lead. However, Yogyakarta lacked the industrial base of Semarang and Surabaya, forcing Surjopranoto to look elsewhere if he wanted to develop links with workers. For some time Sarekat Islam leaders in Yogyakarta had been involved in labour disputes, primarily as mediators between strikers (many of whom were Sarekat Islam members) and managements. The *Adidarmo* also had been used as a complaints bureau by sugar factory workers in the Yogyakarta area, and this would have brought their plight to Surjopranoto's attention.

In announcing the formation of the PFB, Surjopranoto stated that it would organize workers in sugar factories throughout Java in order to combat the power of the capitalists who were oppressing them. Membership was open to all permanent workers in the sugar factories or in the cultivation industry generally, with day labourers and casual workers required to join the *Perserikatan Kaum Buruh*. In practice the PFB did not discriminate between workers, willingly enrolling all factory workers who were prepared to pay the dues. The PFB joining fee was set at 25 cents, with a monthly contribution of 15 cents plus a contribution of 1 per cent of wages to a welfare and support fund. The dues were within the means of the better paid artisans but were more than half a day's wages for ordinary labourers. No wonder that many were reluctant to contribute regularly. Members who were made redundant by a factory were promised support from the union. Moreover, on the death of a member his family would be paid one month's wages.[8] Two years later, in March 1920, the central executive of the PFB established a separate welfare fund to provide financial support to workers on strike, unable to work through sickness or arbitrarily dismissed. Support was again promised to the families of workers who died.[9] The promise of support in time of need was a powerful incentive for factory workers to join; equally the inability of the PFB to meet these unrealistic promises soon disenchanted many.

The PFB's central concern was the improvement of factory workers' wages and conditions. Surjopranoto was worried that many sugar factory workers were frightened of joining the union. They were urged to set aside their fears and realize that only by common action could they improve their lot:

Afraid? What are you afraid of? Remember that your country is very much humiliated because you are afraid . . . Are you afraid of going hungry? How large is one stomach? Are you afraid that your good wife and children will go hungry? God provides food for all in the world. We promise that if the capitalist dares to oppress you he will fully answer for it later.[10]

The explosive growth of the PFB is evident from its membership figures, impressive even when due allowance is made for those who were little more than nominal members. At the end of 1918 it had only around 700 members; by the end of 1919 it had 90 branches with some 8,000 members and by August 1920 it had 190 branches with 31,000 members. At the beginning of 1921 it claimed a membership of 43,000. While this figure must be treated with caution, it does reflect the peak of membership recruitment during the 1920 milling season, even if many did little more than pay their initial joining fee.[11]

The PFB tapped deep-seated grievances of sugar factory workers. It is arguable whether these grievances were any worse in 1919 than they had been fifty years earlier, but they were clearly less tolerable in 1919. Workers in the sugar factories shared many characteristics with workers in the modern sector of the urban economy and were not immune from the enormous changes that had taken place since the advent of nationalist parties, especially since the emergence of Sarekat Islam. Sarekat Islam propaganda had been particularly strong in the sugar growing areas of central and east Java. In 1918 and 1919 it stepped up its campaign against the sugar industry, blaming it for the rice shortage in Java and the impoverishment of the Javanese and urging the government to reduce the area of land used for growing sugar so that more rice could be produced. The campaign was supported by other nationalist parties and by trenchant criticism from Indonesian members of the Volksraad in 1919 and 1920. This strong anti-sugar industry campaign in rural Java coincided with the sudden post-war inflation, raising the political and industrial consciousness of sugar factory workers. The PFB built on this heightened awareness and provided sugar factory workers with the outside leadership they had hitherto lacked. It made the most of its close links with Sarekat Islam and in the popular mind shared many of Sarekat Islam's millenarian and messianic attributes.

By August 1920 there was a PFB branch at almost every sugar

factory in Java. Local leaders were invariably drawn from the skilled, permanent workforce — artisans, clerks, administrative workers and laboratory personnel. There was also a deliberate policy of recruiting people from outside the sugar factories onto local branch executives in order to have some local leaders immune from employer pressure.[12] Teachers, pawnshop workers and railway workers were frequently involved, as were local Sarekat Islam leaders. Often men with strong local influence were sought out. The promoter of the PFB at the Arjawinangan sugar factory in the Cirebon Residency, for example, was a surveyor who had a strong local following as a medium who held frequent seances.[13]

Branches were supervised by a central executive in Yogyakarta and a number of full-time consuls. Consuls organized branches, supervised their activities and financial affairs and generally acted as propagandists for the union within their region. In 1920 there were between eight and ten consuls, each of whom was paid a monthly salary of between f75 and f100, a salary better than that of most skilled workers in the factories. Most consuls were former skilled workers in the sugar factories who had come to the attention of the central executive through their involvement in Sarekat Islam. While they were employees of the Yogyakarta headquarters, few worked full time for the PFB. Most also had paid positions with other labour unions or were assistant editors of one or more newspapers.

Most members of the PFB central executive were also former skilled employees of a sugar factory, or indeed were still employed in the industry. Some, however, were outsiders with no connection to the industry, most notably its chairman Surjopranoto and its secretary Sutardjo. All were active members of Sarekat Islam and many were also executive members of other unions or voluntary organizations. Surjopranoto, for example, was not only a prominent Sarekat Islam leader in Yogyakarta but also a contributing editor to *Oetoesan Hindia* and chairman of a number of other Yogyakarta-based unions.[14]

While almost all labour union leaders were young men in their teens or early twenties, Surjopranoto was 44 years old when he founded the PFB. Friends and opponents alike respected him as a fine public speaker, able to move Javanese audiences through a powerful combination of speaking skills and the personal aura that came from being a scion of the royal house of Paku Alam. While there were many reasons for the cool personal relations between

Surjopranoto and Semaun, not least of which were important ideological differences, it may be that Surjopranoto's aristocratic background, reflected in his bearing and social mores, was also a considerable barrier. In a social milieu where deference to age and status was expected, Semaun was not only the son of a railway worker but was also more than twenty years Surjopranoto's junior.

Surjopranoto complemented the traditional aura of his court background and his brilliant oratory with considerable organizational skills. He was not a Marxist in any systematic sense, but was aware of and influenced by the Marxist ideas then current in the colony. His aristocratic sense of duty towards the ordinary people was strengthened by the socialist critique of the oppressive impact of colonialism on workers and peasants. He was never able to shake off attitudes stemming from his noble birth — most noticeable in his somewhat paternalistic approach to workers — but was disturbed by the exploitation of workers in the modern sector of the economy and convinced that capitalists would only concede better wages when workers were mobilized into strong organizations able to negotiate from a position of strength.

The mood, if not the practice, of the times in all Indonesian organizations was democratic, egalitarian and anti-capitalist. Like Sarekat Islam, as a symbol of this new spirit the PFB used low Javanese, the language of the common people, as the language of its meetings. In its propaganda it constantly tried to change workers' image of themselves, stressing the ways in which they could improve their own lot. Along with most Sarekat Islam leaders Surjopranoto distinguished between foreign and indigenous capitalism. He vehemently opposed the former, seeing foreign capitalism as part of colonial exploitation of ordinary people. However, while he often talked of socialist ideas he was not opposed to indigenous capitalism. Indeed, he derived most of his personal income from a timber business. He accepted the capitalist nature of Indies society but perceived a strong imbalance in the relative power of capital and labour. He envisaged mobilizing workers into strong, centrally controlled and disciplined labour unions, recognized by both government and management, and through direct negotiation and some sort of arbitration system able to redress the balance in favour of the workers. The economic and social system should be retained but made fairer for the ordinary people.

Surjopranoto saw the labour movement as parallel to, but separate from, the political movement. He insisted that the PFB

was primarily an economic organization, though he was well aware that in the eyes of the colonial government labour union activities were barely distinguishable from the wider political movement for independence. Indeed, in an early PFB brochure he described the PFB's growth as being part of the wider awakening taking place in Java.[15] The brochure went on to argue that 'We also know that capital is nothing other than the accumulation of the workers' sufferings', a sentiment difficult to reconcile with Surjopranoto's own business interests and his general acquiescence in indigenous capitalism. It was, though, typical of his speeches and writings which often displayed contradictory ideas and were lacking in a sharp ideological view of the world.

At public meetings, at branch gatherings and in his writings and pamphlets Surjopranoto emphasized the enormous profits of the sugar industry, its capacity to pay improved wages, the marked difference between the industry's treatment of Indonesians and Europeans and the connection between the rice shortage and the exploitation of rural Java by sugar interests. Nationalist parties, particularly Sarekat Islam, were all making much the same arguments,[16] but Surjopranoto linked his critique of the sugar industry with an attempt to mobilize its workers. He was well aware of the problems involved in trying to organize illiterate workers, few of whom had any idea of what a modern labour movement was about. He had a vision of the PFB recognized by employers and slowly able to educate its members into a fuller appreciation of the benefits and responsibilities of membership. While aware of the political implications of PFB activities, he played down the extent of the challenge it represented to European interests in the colony. But in organizing sugar factory workers and confronting the sugar industry, the PFB was challenging not only the economic base of the colony but the prestige, indeed the legitimacy, of European authority.

EARLY ACTIVITY IN THE FACTORIES

THE sugar industry was quick to accuse the PFB of stirring up its workforce, as if unrest and strikes in the industry were new phenomena. In fact, workers in sugar factories and on plantations were not always quiescent. There was a long history of cane burning and of disputes leading to sudden strikes by large numbers of workers.[17] A strike wave in the Yogyakarta region in 1882, for

example, has been well documented. Between August and October that year, an estimated 10,000 workers in six sugar factories, eight sugar plantations, fourteen indigo plantations and two tobacco plantations were involved in a series of strikes, the largest of which lasted almost two months. Strikers demanded higher wages and lighter workloads. After intervention by local government officials their demands were met.[18]

More than three decades later, in the latter months of 1917 and well before the formation of the PFB, growing discontent among sugar factory workers at the impact of inflation on their living standards resulted in another wave of strikes. Some were over demands for higher wages but many were caused by perceived injustice or arbitrary treatment by European supervisors. Of the seven strikes that are known to have occurred in sugar factories in Java between December 1917 and September 1918 (shortly after the PFB was founded), a majority had as their immediate cause the dismissal of a worker who was a member of the local Sarekat Islam branch and most quickly involved local Sarekat Islam leaders. All involved only the permanent skilled workers in the factories, were short lived and occurred during or immediately prior to the milling season. Moreover, as far as can be determined, all were successful after the intervention of local Sarekat Islam leaders and after managers failed to get enough skilled labour from elsewhere to keep the factories operating.

One of these pre-union strikes broke out at the Sumengko sugar factory, near Mojokerto in east Java, on 7 June 1918, after the manager had dismissed an artisan. The dismissed worker had written to the manager seeking a wage rise for artisans, at the same time making a number of insinuations about Chinese workers being favoured for promotion. The strike broke out without the knowledge of the local Sarekat Islam branch, but because Sarekat Islam was particularly active in the Mojokerto area and had recruited widely among his workers, the manager of the sugar factory asked the branch president to help him resolve the dispute. The president, together with the local *wedana*, then spoke with the striking factory workers after which they recommended the reinstatement of the dismissed artisan. Reluctantly, the manager acquiesced, thereby bringing the strike to an end. The Central Sarekat Islam newspaper, *Oetoesan Hindia*, could not refrain from claiming a major victory for the party:

Ha,this is a fine example. People in villages in the Mojokerto area now have begun to understand the power of unity, when only twenty-six people are able to cause a factory to lose quite a few thousand [guilders].[19]

The joy of victory is understandable, but not all strikes were successful. Strikers at a sugar factory in Yogyakarta were forced to return to work empty-handed in July 1918 and their leaders were dismissed.[20] Strikers at another factory in east Java failed to gain the dismissal of a European supervisor accused of maltreatment of Indonesian workers and of speaking contemptuously about Sarekat Islam and its leader Tjokroaminoto.[21] Resentment at arbitrary treatment, and workers' refusal any longer to accept it, was the cause of a strike at the Tangunan factory in March 1918. Again, the strike occurred in a factory in the Mojokerto area, perhaps indicative of the greater self-confidence created among sugar factory workers by an active Sarekat Islam branch. The strike of ninety artisans broke out after the dismissal of Karijoredjo, an artisan who had worked at the factory for sixteen years and who was a member of the local Sarekat Islam branch. In retrospect, the catalyst for the strike is amusing, but it is illustrative of how seemingly small issues were beginning to spark strong reactions from workers. Apparently, while Karijoredjo was at work in the factory a chicken owned by him trespassed into the manager's garden, biting his dog. Soon after, Karijoredjo was summoned by the bookkeeper who became very angry with him. The bookkeeper is reported to have said to him that 'This factory is not a chicken factory, therefore if a chicken belonging to a Javanese enters the garden of a Dutchman it will be killed'. Karijoredjo, obviously a man with some spirit, was moved to respond with a touch of sarcasm, 'If this is the case, then when a dog enters the garden of a Javanese it too will be killed'. All this was too much for the European engineer present at what was supposed to be a dressing down for Karijoredjo. Later that afternoon Karijoredjo was sacked. The other artisans in the factory on hearing of his summary dismissal walked out, refusing to return until he was reinstated. Efforts by the Regent of Mojokerto to get them back to work failed. They remained adamant that Karijoredjo must be reinstated. In the end it took mediation by the Mojokerto branch of Sarekat Islam to resolve the dispute.[22]

GROWTH OF THE PFB

DURING 1919 the PFB concentrated on organizing branches and recruiting members. Consuls often began their work by making contact with the president of the local Sarekat Islam branch in order to acquaint themselves with the local situation. They then moved into a sugar factory kampung, where most of the permanent skilled workers lived, spreading leaflets describing the aims of the PFB in simple terms and advertising a forthcoming meeting. Consuls maintained regular contact with PFB branches, attending meetings and advising local leaders on union procedures such as collecting subscriptions and keeping records and on representing workers' grievances to factory managers. One of the major aims of the PFB was to gain formal recognition from individual managers and from the Sugar Syndicate as a whole. This was never achieved, with almost all managers refusing even to meet PFB consuls.

Strikes continued to break out at sugar factories in 1919, on much the same pattern as in earlier years. The establishment of a PFB branch at a sugar factory sharpened skilled workers' awareness of their exploitation and, as the inflationary pressures mounted, nerved them to demand better wages in compensation. One of the larger strikes occurred at the Brangkal factory in east Java when on 19 March eighty-three skilled workers (including smiths, carpenters, bricklayers, surveyors and laboratory workers) stayed away from work. The immediate cause was that six weeks earlier some long-serving artisans had been changed from day-wages to a monthly wage; the other artisans were aggrieved that only a few of their number were to receive the higher rates and better security. A meeting was organized by the local Sarekat Islam branch, whose president was a surveying clerk at the factory, to discuss the issue and the decision was made to strike. The manager responded by despatching his chief artisan and his chief laboratory worker to strikers' houses to warn that the factory would be closed if they did not return to work immediately. This pressure was unsuccessful, as was a similar mission on 21 March in which the foremen promised a 5 cents per day wage rise if workers returned to work immediately. Foremen seem to have been sent to workers' houses each day of the strike, until on 22 March they reported to the manager that workers would return only if they were given at least a 20 per cent wage rise. The manager refused,

confident that his artisans would eventually be forced to give in. The milling season had yet to begin, and the factory was able to continue essential maintenance work by importing a number of Eurasian, Menadonese and Ambonese artisans. The manager's assessment of the situation proved accurate: strikers were eventually forced to return to work, having gained nothing.[23] Indeed, they must have been disappointed at their failure to gain financial support from workers at nearby factories. Reportedly, only f25 was raised for a strike support fund.[24] The PFB had a major task ahead of it to educate sugar factory workers that they should be concerned with other than local issues of immediate concern to themselves.

Despite managers' fears, the 1919 milling season passed with only a few major disruptions. PFB policy during the year was to discourage local strikes. It urged workers to remain calm and wait until the PFB was better organized to lead them in concerted action against the factories. Much of its propaganda assured them that unless the sugar industry responded to its demands the PFB would organize a major strike during the 1920 milling season.[25] Workers' unrest was fuelled by the sudden surge in the price of rice in 1919 as a succession of poor harvests caused a rice shortage in the colony. PFB propaganda that sugar factory workers' living standards were getting worse struck a responsive chord, raising expectations that 1920 would be the year of action to force improvements.

Industrial unrest was a major item on the agendas of Sugar Syndicate meetings from late 1918.[26] While there was general agreement that there had been a considerable increase in the cost of living, with wages for factory workers largely unchanged from 1913 levels, few managers were prepared to see inadequate wages as the basis of the unrest. They preferred instead to blame irresponsible Sarekat Islam leaders for stirring up an otherwise contented workforce.

Contingency plans were prepared to break strikes. Already by late 1918, sugar factories in the Besuki, Probolinggo and Pasuruan Residencies of east Java agreed to help each other in the event of a strike at any one factory by supplying strike-breakers. They also began to photograph artisans seeking employment, circulating the photographs to local factories in order to find out if they had been employed previously in the industry and if so whether they were

troublemakers.[27] This was a refinement of practices developed in the 1860s and 1870s when managers had kept files on 'untrustworthy' workers.[28]

Efforts to counter the PFB were stepped up in 1919, despite the sensible argument of S. J. Hirsch, the Sugar Syndicate chairman, that 'the antidote to strikes is to ensure that the people are contented.'[29] The Syndicate was uneasy about the attitude of the Indies government in the event of major strikes. Indeed, it was highly critical of privately and publicly expressed views of the Governor-General and many local Residents that wages were too low in the sugar industry and that the PFB was only involved in legitimate economic activities. Factory managers were encouraged to counter the PFB in their areas, with many reports in 1919 of local PFB leaders being summarily dismissed or threatened with dismissal if they did not resign from the union. In July 1919 the Syndicate decided that stronger action on a Java-wide scale was necessary and it urged all members to support financially the recently formed *Politiek Economische Bond* (PEB).[30]

The PEB was founded in 1919 as a staunchly pro-capitalist organization dedicated to countering nationalist parties such as Sarekat Islam and labour unions such as the PFB. Over the following decade it was active in both urban and rural Java and counted in its ranks some of the most reactionary European members of the Volksraad, the colony's largely nominated advisory body to the Governor-General. Individual factories were urged to pledge f500 per year over a three-year period to the PEB, to be paid directly by owners rather than through the factories themselves in order to avoid publicity. Managers were also urged by the Syndicate to buy subscriptions to the Bandung newspaper *Kaoem Moeda*, which was subsidized by the PEB. As early as July 1919 some f22,600 had already been paid to the PEB by sugar interests in the colony.[31] Over the next two years the PEB concentrated on undermining the credibility of the PFB among sugar factory workers. Propagandists were recruited largely from lower level government employees, particularly teachers, pawnshop workers and village heads, who were reportedly paid from f100 to f300 a month for their efforts, considerable sums at a time when a chief valuer in a pawnshop earned around f60 or f70 a month. The local *Inlandsch Bestuur* assisted its work, with reports of meetings being held in houses of *patih*, and of *patih* and *wedana* personally sending letters to government employees 'inviting'

them to attend PEB meetings and become members. When strikes occurred, the PEB assisted sugar factories by spreading propaganda in kampungs and villages, by helping to recruit strike-breakers and by offering money to key workers as an inducement to return to work. There were frequent reports of PEB propagandists falsely claiming to be representatives of the PFB headquarters and urging strikers to return to work.[32] The PEB was proud of the diverse methods it employed against what it described as '. . . the revolutionary infection with which the whole of the native world is in danger of becoming tainted' [33]

EXPANSION OF ACTIVITIES

THE first PFB congress was held at Yogyakarta from 31 December 1919 to 2 January 1920. It was opened by Surjopranoto, who in a stirring speech explained the PFB programme and reviewed its activities during its first year of operation.[34] His major theme was the damaging effects of capitalism on the Javanese people: while the capitalist class became increasingly wealthy and powerful, the working class became increasingly poor. The people's lot was so bad that more and more women were forced to accept low-paid work in order to help their families survive. The PFB, he asserted, was the only proctector of workers in the sugar industry. Workers were urged to support it.

The speech was typical of the major public statements of Surjopranoto, whether at PFB and Sarekat Islam congresses or in the pages of *Oetoesan Hindia* and the PFB journal *Boeroeh Bergerak*. It was well delivered, in language and concepts within the understanding of branch delegates. The same was true of Surjopranoto's speeches at branch meetings, where he stressed basic issues that affected workers' lives and were within their experience. At the same time, Surjopranoto sought to broaden factory workers' vision so that they might see their struggle for a better life as part of the broader struggle of workers throughout the colony. Here, though, he was less successful, with sugar factory workers retaining a localized view of their grievances.

The congress decided that Surjopranoto should write to the Governor-General and to the Volksraad seeking government regulation of labour conditions in the sugar industry. It also decided to inform all sugar factories that the PFB and its consuls represented workers, that it would make every effort to improve workers'

conditions and that it would vigorously oppose any obstacles put in its way. While these motions and the general mood of the congress signalled the beginning of a more militant phase in the union's activities, the congress cautioned branches against going on strike without advising the central executive in advance. Surjopranoto feared that important though local enthusiasm was, on its own it was far from sufficient to ensure the successful outcome of a strike. A graduated programme of action against individual sugar factories which refused to negotiate with the PFB was endorsed, ranging from threats and boycotts to local and general strikes.[35]

The congress adopted a twenty-six point working programme which formed the basis of PFB negotiations in the coming year. The programme contained detailed provisions for improvements in wages, working hours, pensions and housing. It was distilled into five basic demands: an end to arbitrary treatment of workers; three months' wages in lieu of notice if a worker was dismissed for reasons other than gross incompetence or laziness; resort to arbitration where differences between workers and sugar factories could not be resolved by direct negotiations; formal recognition by the sugar factories of PFB executives and consuls; improvements in the living standards of workers.[36]

The growth of the PFB in 1919 and the sporadic strikes had greatly concerned sugar interests in the colony. They became visibly alarmed by the massive growth in PFB membership in 1920 and a sudden outburst of strikes in the sugar factories. The Java Sugar Employers Association collected statistics on strikes between 1920 and 1923 which, while they refer to strikes at only the 160 out of 190 sugar factories that were members of the Association, provide a broader framework within which PFB activity must be viewed. The statistics distinguish between strikes which occurred during the milling season (May to September) and those which occurred outside it, as well as breaking down strikers into employment categories.[37]

In 1920 strikes broke out at seventy-two of the 160 sugar factories. Of these, twenty-eight occurred outside the milling season, involving about 4,700 workers, while the other forty-four, involving around 20,716 workers, broke out during the season itself. Most strikers in the pre- or post-season strikes were permanent workers — 2,687 out of an estimated 4,700 — and most of these were artisans. In contrast, during the milling season most strikers were seasonal workers (7,584) or workers in and around

the factories (10,581) with only a minority permanent employees (1,997), though the skilled workers continued to lead and organize the strikes. Even though there were strikes at seventy-two factories in 1920, with a loss of 86,000 working days, only a small proportion of the total number of workers employed in the factories were involved. It was estimated that there were about 47,000 permanent workers in the sugar industry in 1920 and of these only about 10 per cent went on strike. More significant than the raw figures is that, of the permanent workers who did go on strike, almost all were the most skilled workers who were essential for the continued operation of the factories.[38]

PFB consuls stepped up their propaganda efforts in the early months of 1920. Organization of a new branch was usually in the hands of either PFB leaders at nearby factories or leaders of local Sarekat Islam branches. Meetings were organized with the regional consul as the key speaker and as many as 200 people attended. The executives of local branches were composed of skilled workers at the factories. Indeed, of the branches where full details of executives are known, not one had even a single unskilled worker on it.[39]

PFB activists were very often men who had for some time been involved in the local Sarekat Islam branch and had learnt something about the organization of a voluntary organization. They recruited workers both in the kampungs and in the factories themselves, talking to fellow workers during meal breaks, spreading leaflets, urging them to attend branch meetings and collecting membership dues on pay day. Managers tried to prevent the spread of PFB propaganda in their factories, on many occasions sacking workers caught in the act, but they could not supervise workers all the time.

Once a branch was established at a sugar factory, it usually very quickly served on the manager a list of demands for improved wages and conditions. The work programme adopted by the first congress formed the basis of these demands. At some factories the very formation of the PFB was a stimulus for the manager immediately to announce improvements in wages and bonuses. At others, the leaders of the newly formed PFB would approach a manager who would then concede enough of their demands to satisfy workers. Wage increases of 15 to 25 per cent on the rates prevailing in 1919 were common, as were increased bonuses.[40] Most managers, however, refused to recognize the PFB branch and

many refused to concede any demands made on them. Some reacted by dismissing workers who were on the local branch executive, which invariably caused most artisans, and many unskilled workers as well, to walk out demanding their reinstatement. In some cases, though, the intervention of a PFB consul or the president of the local Sarekat Islam branch was enough to persuade a manager that his best interests would be served by adopting a less confrontationist approach.

As the sugar milling season approached, many managers took a harder line towards workers involved in the PFB. They were under pressure from their directors and also from the Sugar Syndicate, both of which were concerned that a major strike wave would break out as soon as the milling season got under way, with disastrous consequences for the industry. Reports began to increase in February and March of managers not only dismissing workers who were PFB leaders but also threatening to sack all workers who were members of the union. Threats became ultimatums and often led to mass sackings. At the Sempalwadak sugar factory in Malang Regency, for example, a propaganda meeting to establish a local branch of the union was held on 21 March, with Surjopranoto as the main speaker. The next day the manager told all of his 170 permanent workers that if they joined the PFB they would be sacked. This threat was ignored and the entire permanent workforce joined the union. Two days later the manager again told them that if they did not resign from the union immediately they would be dismissed. Workers still refused to resign and on 24 March all were sacked.[41]

At other factories strikes were triggered by the sacking of PFB leaders, invariably described by managers as 'troublemakers' or 'agitators'. In February a foreman at the Purwosari sugar factory (Kertosono), who was a member of the executive of the local PFB branch, was sacked because he had tried to recruit for the union in the factory. All foremen then went on strike in a show of solidarity.[42] The strike was only ended when the PFB central executive intervened and persuaded the manager to reinstate the foreman.[43] At the Sumberrejo sugar factory, workers struck early in March after three of their number, who were the vice-president, secretary and commissioner of the local PFB, were dismissed for advocating a strike. The vice-president of the PFB, a surveyor named Sudirman Tjokrokusumo, went to see the manager late in February along with about a hundred artisans and asked for a 25

per cent pay rise plus a bonus of three months' wages for the 1919 season. The manager refused the request for a wage rise but said that he would refer the matter of a bonus to his directors in the Netherlands, adding that if the workers were not happy with this response then they could always seek work elsewhere. The workers went away. Some distance from the factory they held an impromptu meeting at which they called on Sudirman to organize a strike. Sudirman was reluctant to do this, but realizing the mood of his fellow workers asked them if they were brave enough to see out a protracted dispute. Amidst further loud cries for a strike many of the workers took an oath to support a strike to the end. A strike was called which lasted more than a week, until in the end the manager conceded his workers demands. He refused, however, to re-employ the three dismissed workers, and, despite workers' promises of solidarity, Sudirman and his colleagues were forced to seek work elsewhere.[44]

One of the largest strikes in the months leading up to the start of the 1920 milling season in May occurred at the Krian sugar factory in Sidoarjo after the manager had dismissed a laboratory worker on 9 March because he was a member of the PFB. The entire workforce immediately stopped work, discussed the issue and then informed the manager that they would go on strike if their fellow worker was not reinstated. Local PFB leaders called on the PFB central executive in Yogyakarta for support. That same day the owners of the factory, Kooy and Company in Surabaya, received a telegram from the Yogyakarta headquarters of the PFB warning that unless the dismissed laboratory worker was reinstated the workers at the Krian sugar factory would go on strike and that any strike would quickly spread to the other four factories nearby owned by the company. The owners were clearly angered by what they saw as PFB intimidation. Shortly after, the Krian manager called his workers together to inform them that if the PFB members among them did not immediately resign and join the PEB they would be sacked. Workers reacted by walking out of the factory. The following day workers at the nearby Balongbende sugar factory, also owned by Kooy and Company, informed the manager that they too would strike if the laboratory worker at Krian was not reinstated. They were then given the choice of resigning from the PFB and joining the PEB or losing their jobs: all walked out and work at the factory came to a halt.[45] By 12 March there were 120 workers on strike at Krian (ninety

artisans, twelve clerks and laboratory workers, with the rest foremen and labourers) and 160 at Balongbende (120 artisans, twelve clerks and laboratory workers with the rest foremen and labourers).[46] Strikes were also provoked at two other company sugar factories when the same ultimatum regarding membership of the PFB was put to workers.

Surjopranoto and Tjokroaminoto rushed to investigate.[47] They found not only obdurate managers, clearly under strict instructions from head office in Surabaya to take a hard line against the PFB, but also physical intimidation of strikers. Workers employed by the Krian sugar factory were ordered to leave their company-owned houses but they refused to do so unless the manager had a court order. Angered by this defiance of his authority, the manager went to the house of Raden Sastrosardjono, the president of the PFB at the Krian factory, accompanied by two high-ranking European employees. Sastrosardjono was not at home, having gone to Yogyakarta to consult with PFB leaders. On hearing of this from Sastrosardjono's wife, the manager demanded to know why they had not moved out of their house as instructed. He then called in a force of twenty-one labourers and four foremen who stripped the house of all furniture, clothing and personal belongings, throwing them out onto the street. Having made an example of the PFB president, he left Sastrosardjono's wife and children in tears, sitting outside their home with their belongings.[48]

The Balongbende strike was not over until the middle of May — the original strike at Krian probably lasted just as long though there is no clear indication of when it did end. On Friday 14 May, twenty-two of the striking artisans at Balongbende returned to work and asked to be re-employed, promising the manager that the rest of the artisans, all of whom had in the meantime found work elsewhere, would return to work the following Monday. On the Monday almost all of the 120 striking artisans were again at work, but the manager refused to re-employ three foremen artisans whom he regarded as the ringleaders. Those artisans who had not gone on strike were paid a special bonus, and as a result of his experience the manager established a company union to try to compete with the PFB for influence among his workers.[49]

Workers' distrust of sugar factory managers was widespread and this compounded their sense of injustice that their wages had not kept pace with inflation, even though the sugar industry was

making record profits. All of the strikes in the first few months of 1920 were either spontaneous walkouts by workers or were organized by local PFB leaders. While forced to throw its support behind most of the strikes once they began, PFB consuls and central leaders endeavoured to bring them to a speedy end. They acted as mediators between workers and managers. In some cases their efforts were rewarded, but in many others managers were in no mood to compromise, refusing even to discuss the issue with the PFB. As the Adviser for Native Affairs rightly acknowledged in September 1920, when commenting on the rash of strikes in the sugar factories that year:

> The central executive was more the follower than the leader. If a strike broke out anywhere or appeared to be no longer avoidable, then the central executive frequently tried to assert its leadership by despatching a telegram.[50]

Surjopranoto recognized that the immediate cause of the strikes was the post-war inflation but saw little long-term improvement in workers' lot unless discontent could be transformed from local outbursts into organized action on a Java-wide scale. Accordingly, late in March he sent a circular to all sugar factories in Java expressing concern that because managers so little understood the wishes of their workers, increasingly tense relations would soon lead to strikes. The PFB central executive, he argued, was not the originator of the strikes, rather it became involved only after they had broken out. He then drew attention to what he believed were the deep-seated causes of worker discontent. Firstly, there was arbitrary and unfair treatment of workers by managers. Secondly, there was open contempt of the PFB by managers. Thirdly, there was mishandling of workers either by verbal abuse or even physical blows. Fourthly, there was harassment of the union in the factories, which forced it to work in secret, which in turn only served to make employers even more suspicious of it. Fifthly, there was the factories' refusal to recognize the PFB. Finally, there was widespread uncertainty among sugar factory workers because some managers were sacking people for no apparent reason. Surjopranoto concluded by warning that whether the PFB struggle to improve the workers' lot went along evolutionary or revolutionary lines depended totally on the attitude of employers.[51]

The Sugar Syndicate saw the PFB as a dangerous organization. It was in this mood that it received the circular from Surjopranoto on 14 April, together with a request that it discuss three basic issues. Firstly, acknowledgement of each other's organization. Secondly, the creation of an arbitration commission. Thirdly, the creation of uniform minimum wage regulations for every category of worker in the industry. Surjopranoto asked for a reply by 5 May: although unstated, by the beginning of May the sugar milling season would be moving into full swing, making factories vulnerable to strike action.[52] The Syndicate initially decided to ignore the PFB letter, but, under pressure from some members, eventually sent a brief reply brusquely stating that it would not acknowledge the union. Its public objection was that the PFB had the same aims as the newly formed labour union federation, the PPKB, which it regarded as a communist-controlled revolutionary organization.[53]

This was a convenient argument for the Syndicate, but even if the PFB had in no way been connected with the labour union federation or with Sarekat Islam, recognition would still have been unlikely. The growth of the PFB not only challenged the accepted relations between management and labour in the colony but also aroused deep feelings of insecurity among Europeans. Managers and supervisors were confused, and at times alarmed, by the speed of change in the social and political consciousness of a large part of their Indonesian workforce. Refusal to acknowledge the PFB was a flat denial by Europeans that the old ways of managing workers needed any more than cosmetic changes. Negotiation with the union of European employees in the industry, the *Suikerbond*, was difficult enough, but at least it was European negotiating with European. Acknowledgement of and negotiating with the PFB entailed overthrowing the caste-like attitudes that prevailed in the colony, and nowhere more strongly than in the sugar industry. Listening to the advice of a handpicked Council of Elders in a mill was within the framework of a manager's paternalistic attitude to his workforce. Holding negotiations with Indonesian intellectuals or, even worse, uneducated artisans, on a basis of equality was outside the bounds of possibility for all but a few managers and certainly for the Sugar Syndicate as a whole.

What the Syndicate did not say in its reply to the PFB, though Surjopranoto was probably well aware of it, was that it had already established a commission to investigate wages and conditions at

sugar factories and on plantations with a view to adopting uniform rates for the industry. The same Syndicate meeting that established the commission had reaffirmed that for the moment workers should not be forced to choose between membership of the PFB and their jobs. Indeed, individual factories were warned against issuing such ultimatums because this would only exacerbate an already tense situation, giving the PFB further ammunition in its efforts to gain a foothold among sugar factory workers.[54] The Syndicate had endorsed the policy of the Kooy group of sugar factories, believing it better to force a strike before the milling season began in the hope that it could destroy the credibility of the PFB. While these strikes had been broken, members were surprised and concerned that it had taken workers so long to concede defeat. With the approach of the milling season, more cautious tactics to defeat the PFB were called for. There was particular concern that the close relationship between sugar factory workers and rural people would enable them to draw on village support during a strike, especially after the rice harvest when food would be cheaper and relatively plentiful in rural Java.[55]

The Sugar Syndicate's action in establishing a commission was a direct response to the Indies government's instruction to all Residents in sugar areas on 1 April to inquire into wages and working conditions in sugar factories in their areas.[56] For some months Residents had been warning the government in Batavia that there was considerable unrest in the sugar factories and that they expected large-scale strikes to be organized by the PFB and Sarekat Islam in the coming milling season. Residents were instructed to hold discussions with factory managers and workers in order to design new labour and wage regulations satisfactory to both sides. They were cautioned to act as mediators, but were also instructed to warn managers that if they rejected improvements in wages and conditions after an inquiry found them necessary, then no government assistance could be expected in the event of a strike. Residents were also instructed to consult a wide cross-section of workers and not concern themselves with whether or not a worker was a member of the PFB. They were also cautioned against regarding the 'trusted men' put forward by the sugar factories as truly representing workers' wishes.[57]

The Sugar Syndicate was well aware that while Residents were concerned by the growth of Sarekat Islam and the PFB, they also had no particular liking for the sugar industry, considering it

to have made excessive profits in recent years and to have shown little or no concern for the welfare of its workers. As early as November 1918 the Syndicate chairman had expressed his fears that the government would not intervene if Sarekat Islam organized strikes in the industry. The Syndicate's protestations to the Governor-General that the government inquiry was unnecessary, and that strikes were the product of revolutionary agitation rather than economic conditions, fell on deaf ears.[58] The opinion of J. Schippers, Resident of Surabaya, that workers in the sugar industry were desperately impoverished, especially if they were semi-permanent day labourers, was shared by almost all Residents in sugar growing areas. It was opinions like this that were influencing officials in Batavia.[59] Schippers argued that even a 50 per cent wage increase would be insufficient to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing at a time of rapidly rising prices. Sugar factory workers, he argued, had come to understand the power of a strike and the 'wild strikes' had indeed forced improvements in wages because they had struck fear into employers' hearts.[60]

The Residents' first step was to call meetings of representatives of the regional divisions of the Sugar Syndicate at which they tried to impress that wages and conditions had to be improved. In many cases they were met by strong opposition, if not open hostility, to what was seen as government interference which would only further encourage the PFB. In the words of one Syndicate member, 'We want no politics in the factories'.[61] Residents countered by insisting that government intervention was the only way to ensure fair wages and conditions in the industry. Replying to sharp criticism from the secretary of the Cirebon section of the Sugar Syndicate, the Resident of Cirebon, a strong critic of the industry's social impact, argued that:

> . . . the government must intervene, because managers have not paid enough attention to the spirit of the times and the interests of the people. They should have done this themselves much earlier. It is thanks to the action of the PFB that better living conditions are being created for the workers.[62]

The Sugar Syndicate had taken a strong stand against participating in any inquiry in which any PFB leader not a worker in the industry was present. It refused to give even the slightest recognition to the union. In most cases, however, such protestations were

ignored. Some Residents agreed with the Sugar Syndicate representatives' description of PFB activities as essentially political, but others pointed to the huge profits made by sugar companies during the war years while wages were generally no higher than they had been in 1913. Some Residents were able quickly to reach agreement with the local branch of the Sugar Syndicate on improvements in wages and conditions in their area. Others found the going much more difficult. Residents visited some or all of the sugar factories in their area in order to find out workers' grievances at first hand or at least ordered their Assistant Resident to do so. Where managers refused to allow a PFB leader on the premises, Assistant Residents were forced to convene meetings in nearby villages or kampungs where local PFB leaders could act as spokesmen for factory workers.[63]

The Residents' inquiries continued through April, May and June with agreements slowly reached with sugar factories on a Residency-wide basis. In some Residencies, however, agreement was not reached until as late as August or September. Sugar factories in all Residencies were finally persuaded to accept a uniform minimum level of wages and conditions, with improvements backdated in most cases to 1 January. The details varied from Residency to Residency, but in all cases represented significant improvements on wages and conditions operating in 1919. The uniform contracts in the Surakarta Residency, for example, included wages rises of between 25 and 30 per cent, overtime payments and improved conditions for sick leave, holidays, pensions and housing.[64]

UNREST DURING THE MILLING SEASON

THE Indies government had hoped that Residents' inquiries into wages and conditions in sugar factories and their negotiation of new uniform contracts would take the wind out of the PFB sails. The PFB certainly did go into decline at some factories where managers were quick to assist Residents in their inquiries and willing to introduce substantial improvements. The NHM group of sugar factories, for example, quickly doubled wages and drew up proposals for improved housing in factory kampungs, provision of clothing for workers at subsidized prices and the establishment of facilities such as football fields, cinemas or schools.[65] Not that this always deterred sugar factory workers from taking direct action

anyway in support of even higher wages or demanding an end to arbitrary treatment.

Many managers were slow to concede improved conditions, and labour relations in most sugar factories remained tense as the 1920 milling season moved into full swing in May. Indeed, while strikes broke out at twenty-eight factories in the months leading up to the milling season, during the season itself workers at another forty-four factories went on strike. As in previous strikes, leadership was in the hands of the local branches, supported often by the PFB regional consuls. The PFB central executive in Yogyakarta had no control over these strikes; indeed on a number of occasions in June and July Surjopranoto urged consuls and branches to postpone strike action until the union had received a formal response from the Sugar Syndicate. These urgings were to no avail. The organizational structure of the PFB was not strong enough to keep all its paid consuls in line, let alone control local branches or angry sugar factory workers.

The Indonesian workforce was encouraged in its demands for better wages by the success of European employees. The European workers' union, the *Suikerbond*, had negotiated large wage rises in 1919 and again in 1920 after threatening industrial action unless its demands were met.[66] The permanent skilled Indonesian workforce in the sugar factories worked in close proximity to European workers and was well aware of the latter's wage gains. It was the skilled workers who were the PFB activists in the factories and it was these men who pressured local and central PFB executives to support them when they went on strike. The Sugar Syndicate had for some time been concerned that the threats by the *Suikerbond* would further encourage Indonesian workers to direct action. It was even more concerned in May 1920 when the *Suikerbond* publicly sought from the PFB a joint approach to the Syndicate for better wages and conditions. Surjopranoto welcomed the approach, but nothing eventuated, indicating that it was probably no more than a bargaining ploy by the *Suikerbond* in its own negotiations with the Syndicate.[67] Certainly, the Syndicate quickly acceded to its European employees' wage demands, thereby ensuring that they stayed on the job when Indonesian workers went on strike. The Syndicate's willingness to negotiate with the *Suikerbond* and grant large wage increase to European workers only served further to convince some Residents that it was short-sighted in its treatment of its Indonesian workers.

Not all strikes in 1920 were over wages, but workers' general awareness of being poorly paid at a time when the sugar industry was making record profits contributed to their open discontent over other issues. A strike occurred late in May at the Pandaan sugar factory, in the Bangil Regency, the immediate cause of which was that workers felt unfairly treated. Some workers had been sacked and other threatened with dismissal for being members of the PFB and there was general harrasment of workers by European supervisors. At a local branch meeting one PFB member complained bitterly about the language used against him by factory supervisors. The meeting agreed that Indonesian workers should no longer have to put up with this and demanded the dismissal of two supervisors, or at least their removal elsewhere in the factory, otherwise they would strike. It took the chairman, who was the local PFB consul, some time to calm them down and get them to agree to hold off direct action until he had discussed the matter with the manager. The following morning, 22 May, the PFB consul went to meet the manager to convey the sentiments of the meeting, but was told that he was under instructions from his directors not to meet with PFB representatives.

A further PFB meeting on 24 May decided to send a letter to the manager stating that if the two supervisors were not removed and if he did not receive a PFB delegation then they would immediately strike. The local *wedana* was present, urging workers not to strike but to await the arrival of the Assistant Resident and the Regent of Bangil who were coming the following day to investigate their grievances. The manager, of course, ignored the PFB letter and on the morning of 25 May the sugar factory was silent as workers carried out their threat. That day most of the strikers assembled outside the *wedana*'s house to meet the Regent and Assistant Resident of Bangil. But when these officials refused to listen to the PFB consul as the spokesman for the workers, the consul led all the workers out of the meeting in protest. That night a PFB meeting, attended by some 350 people, heard the consul argue that a strike of four days or longer would lose the factory thousands of guilders because already cut sugar cane would turn acidic and be useless for milling. He urged strikers to remain firm, accept work elsewhere but above all ignore the efforts of PEB propagandists and not resort to unrest. A support committee was elected to rally the strikers and raise money for their families, with the president and vice-president of the Sarekat Islam branch at

Pandaan its leading members. It was all to no avail. In the end, workers were forced to return empty-handed.[68]

Despite the Sugar Syndicate's opposition to arbitrary dismissal of PFB members, factory managers continued to go their own way, if anything increasing their tough approach to workers who joined the union. This action was the immediate cause of a number of strikes with workers organized by the local PFB in defence of a dismissed member.

A strike at the Tulangan sugar factory in Sidoarjo in the middle of May was typical of many whose immediate cause was the dismissal of PFB members. The secretary of the PFB branch at that factory was a head guard of the sugar cane, a man by the name of Purbowidjojo. Purbowidjojo was summoned a number of times by the local police to explain why a man in his responsible position was a PFB member. The sugar factory and the local police were clearly worried that PFB agitation might lead to attempts to burn the cane as it stood in the fields awaiting harvesting, a common form of peasant protest and one resorted to by striking sugar factory and plantation workers in 1882, and that because of his PFB membership Purbowidjojo would not be a reliable guard. Despite warnings by the police and the Assistant Resident, Purbowidjojo refused to resign from the PFB and in the middle of May he was sacked. A few days after his dismissal, the Tulangan branch of the PFB held a mass meeting of sugar factory workers to discuss the issue. A list of twenty-three demands was formulated and sent to the manager with the warning that there would be a strike if he did not accept them. Apart from the demand for Purbowidjojo's reinstatement, the PFB demanded recognition as the workers' representative, a 50 per cent wage rise from the beginning of May, three months' bonus (instead of the current two), an 8 hour day and a host of improvements in their conditions.[69] There is no record of the manager's response, but as a strike broke out soon after it can be assumed that few, if any, of the demands were met.

Even where sugar factories agreed to improve wages, strikes still sometimes occurred because workers lacked any trust in a factory's promises. One such strike was at the De Maas sugar factory in Besuki, east Java, in May. The manager had prepared new contracts for signature by his artisans on 15 May which included three main provisions: a wage rise of 50 per cent on December 1919 levels; a three months' bonus for the 1920 milling season, to be paid in three instalments with bonuses forfeited if

there were any interruptions to work; and an undertaking from workers not to make any further demands on the factory. Apparently, the artisans were unhappy at the third clause in the contract but nevertheless reluctantly signed it. Only after they had all signed did the manager announce that the increased wages would not be paid until 20 May, instead of immediately as had been expected. Furthermore, he announced that as the factory had already paid a 33 per cent increase from 1 March, it would pay the additional 17 per cent on 20 May backdated only to 1 May. According to a newspaper report, the angry artisans went around the factory saying that the manager had deceived them.

On 23 May the regional PFB consul came to the factory, was informed that workers felt cheated and called a meeting that evening of all workers at the factory. The manager then refused to allow any workers rostered for work that night to attend, warning that any that did so would be sacked. Some eight workers ignored the warning, attended the meeting instead of going to work that night, and were immediately dismissed. The meeting was well attended by day-shift workers, who made a set of demands on the manager including withdrawal of the contracts already signed. The following morning, 25 May, an artisan who turned up for work as usual was sacked because he had attended the PFB meeting the night before even though a day-shift worker. Most artisans then left the factory, followed by laboratory and other workers, demanding the dismissal of the manager.[70]

Local strikes increased in number in June and July, despite Surjopranoto urging branches to restrain workers until the central executive decided whether or not to organize a general strike in August. The difficulties faced by the PFB central executive in preventing wildcat strikes occurring is well illustrated by a strike that suddenly broke out at the Purwokerto and Klampok factories in east Java on 16 May. The issue, as usual, was wages but the local PFB branch executive had for some time been following central policy by advising workers at the two sugar factories to hold off from striking until a general strike was organized. This advice was rejected by workers impatient for more money and convinced that the only way to get it was to strike. Once the strike broke out the PFB branch executive felt that it had to do something in order to retain credibility. It negotiated some concessions from the manager, but when these were put to a meeting of strikers they still refused to go back to work. It was only after a persuasive speech

by Najoan, representing the Yogyakarta central executive, that they reluctantly agreed to return.[71]

Strikes during the 1920 milling season were better organized than in previous years. In many ways the PFB itself was better organized. It had appointed consuls for each of the sugar growing Residencies and had established a central office in Yogyakarta which attempted to monitor branches and keep them informed of the central leadership's decisions and plans. While some branches were slow in forwarding members' dues to Yogyakarta and while many members were loath to part with more than their initial joining fee, nevertheless considerable sums of money did flow regularly from the branches to the Yogyakarta headquarters, thereby sustaining the machinery of the union. A central fund was created in 1920, for Surjopranoto was well aware that without it workers could be starved back to work in any confrontation with the sugar factories. But it was never larger than f20-30,000, grossly inadequate to support a general strike.[72] Workers generally did not have enough money over and above their immediate needs to be able to support a strike fund, even if they understood its importance. The PFB realized that the only time they did have relatively large sums of money was when annual bonuses were paid. It therefore tried to persuade workers to donate part of their bonuses to a strike fund — but with little success.

There was generally little financial support for strikers beyond what money could be raised locally. In some strikes, the PFB headquarters seems to have made limited money available to strikers on the condition that they pay it back as soon as the strike was over. Branches held *wayang* performances, sold portraits of Surjopranoto for one guilder (complete with the caption 'Surjopranoto — the notorious strike king') and went into villages in the vicinity of sugar factories explaining the issues to farmers and seeking gifts of rice, vegetables or fruit.[73] Of course, some strikers were able to get work elsewhere during a strike, but there were few alternative sources of employment for skilled, let alone unskilled, sugar factory workers. However, despite their facade of unity, some sugar factories were not averse to employing strikers from a nearby factory if they were short of labour.[74]

The PFB was also better organized in its efforts to sustain workers' morale during strikes. In the Madiun Residency of east Java, scene of many strikes during the 1920 milling season, it established a strike bureau from which it despatched what it called

'strike police' to the scene of each strike. The 'strike police' wore distinctive hats with white bands around them and stood at the intersection of roads leading to the strike-bound factories, ready to intercept anybody walking to the factories seeking work. The presence of a PFB official indicated to unsuspecting potential workers enticed by the strike-bound factory's recruiting that the factory was the centre of a strike. Persuasive talk and handbills complemented their sheer physical presence to convince many would-be strike-breakers to go elsewhere.[75]

Of course, peer group pressure from strikers in kampungs and villages, accompanied sometimes by veiled threats and intimidation, also helped keep prospective strike-breakers away from the sugar factories and persuaded many factory workers to join the strike. Reports were made of outside workers brought into strike-bound factories only being able to eat at local *warung* on payment of higher prices. The higher prices subsidized the food of strikers. At other *warung*, strike-breakers were refused service altogether. On some occasions, when a group of workers decided to strike, there were reports that oaths of loyalty and solidarity had been taken.[76] Certainly, the artisans and other skilled workers who were the driving force behind the strikes did all in their power to persuade less skilled workers also to stay away from work. Meetings were held almost nightly in the villages and factory kampungs during a strike in order to sustain the momentum and pressure waverers to stand firm.

In a strike early in August at the Purwodadi and Rejosari sugar factories in the Madiun Residency, for example, meetings were held in surrounding villages every night in the weeks leading up to the strike. Skilled workers from the factories exploited their family and friendship links with nearby villages which supplied seasonal labour, by pointing out that they too were oppressed by the sugar industry. At a large meeting called to announce the commencement of the strike the following day, the major speaker was a Sarekat Islam leader who was a local figure of some note, being the son-in-law of the *penghulu* of Magetan, a much respected and widely known man. The meeting was told that the Resident, the Regent and the local *wedana* were all enemies of the workers and would be punished by Allah for their actions. Much was also made of Surjopranoto's connection with the Paku Alam Court, it being suggested that the Sultan of Yogyakarta approved of the strike. Finally, the audience of mostly simple villagers who

worked as seasonal day-wage labourers in the sugar factories were told that the Governor-General himself had said that the sugar industry was too rich. Having enlisted the approval of three eminent authorities, the speaker concluded that a strike was morally justified and urged his listeners to join it.[77]

The sugar factories countered by stepping up their anti-union activities. Many factories had established a Council of Elders, whose members were usually older, trusted employees selected by managers, but occasionally elected by the permanent workers themselves.[78] The councils were intended to provide alternative channels for grievances to be brought to managers' attention, thereby undermining support for the PFB. Not that the Councils of Elders were always compliant. A number of cases were reported of councils surreptitiously cooperating with the PFB as much as with local managers. The Council of Elders at the Rejoagung sugar factory in the Madiun Residency, for example, had its own funds, supplied by the factory, and when Hadisubroto, the PFB consul for Madiun, was arrested in August 1920 for a speaking offence it gave f150 for the support of his family and the payment of his legal defence.[79]

Financial support from the industry to the PEB was maintained and PEB propagandists were used by strike-bound factories to try to break the resolve of strikers and weaken support for the PFB. Smaller anti-PFB organizations were also supported by individual sugar factories.[80] Other factories tried to sponsor company unions. The Pakis factory offered f2,000 for the use of a company union: the union promised f30 for the family of any member who died and a pension of one-third of wages to workers with thirty years' service. The only condition was that members undertake not to join the PFB.[81] The manager of the Tasikmadu sugar factory gave 30 to 50 per cent wage increases to those who joined a company-sponsored union linked to the PEB, but nothing to PFB members.[82] The Jatibarang sugar factory tried a different approach. It offered a subsidy to its PFB branch equal to members' monthly contributions provided that the branch did not affiliate to the central executive of the PFB in Yogyakarta, retained all money in the branch and did not support PFB strikes at other factories. The branch rejected the offer.[83]

Cooperation between sugar factories and local government officials together with anti-union activities funded by the sugar industry did much to undermine the PFB and lessen the impact of

strikes. Strike-breakers were recruited from far-away villages and sugar factories or from nearby urban areas and were brought into the factories under police guard, often accommodated in the factory compounds in order to prevent them becoming targets for strikers' persuasion or abuse. In October 1920 one of the major engineering companies in Surabaya complained that since the beginning of the strikes in the sugar factories in March many of its skilled workers had been lured inland by the higher wages on offer to strike-breakers. As a consequence it was more than a month behind schedule in filling its contracts.[84] A year later, as we have seen, the same company lamented that the skilled workers who had experienced higher wages as strike-breakers in the sugar factories had returned to Surabaya in a militant mood, stirred up workers and forced the engineering companies into an expensive lock-out.[85]

Some sugar factory managers wanted to recruit Chinese to replace Javanese strikers but were restrained by Residents who were fearful that this would only inflame the situation.[86] Local Residents did, however, cooperate by stationing armed police around the strike-bound factories to protect those willing to work and, equally important, to intimidate those on strike. Managers usually had their own informers at meetings of their workers, and on learning that a strike was about to break out, often arranged with a Resident to have armed police sent to the factory overnight. Where the PFB stationed its own 'strike police' on roads leading to a sugar factory, a detective or armed policeman was detailed to stand next to him. The local bureaucracy was swung into action behind the sugar factories, with Indonesian officials sent into villages and kampungs to urge people to go to work and where necessary to intimidate the intransigent. Residents' sympathy for the plight of sugar factory workers did not extend to tolerance of disturbances of 'tranquillity and order'. Bonuses were often paid to those who stayed at work during a strike and strike-breakers were paid up to twice the normal rates, despite the official opposition of the Syndicate. At one factory watches were distributed to artisans who did not go on strike: gold, silver or nickel, depending on the man's years of service.[87]

Other measures were taken to control the Indonesian workforce, the most important of which was the establishment of fingerprinting bureaus. These fingerprinting bureaus were initially set up by local sections of the Sugar Syndicate after their

experience of the strikes in 1919. Most of the sugar areas had established bureaus by the end of the 1920 season, with the whole operation taken over and centralized by the Java Sugar Employers Association (JSWB). The JSWB was established in July 1920 separate from, but closely linked to, the Sugar Syndicate. Its role was to monitor labour unions, collect statistics on disputes and generally concern itself with industrial relations in the industry. It was housed in the Surabaya offices of the Sugar Syndicate and made use of the Syndicate's personnel for its office work. It established its own political intelligence network and produced monthly reports on the activities of political parties and labour unions in sugar growing areas, reports that were not always regarded as reliable by the government. In justifying the creation of the JSWB, its secretary argued that it should have been established two year years earlier. He was in no doubt as to its function:

> . . . as well as directing much effort at restoring the position of authority which we have lost for the moment, there is the possibility of restoring labour relations in the industry in such a way that for many years to come power will remain in the hands of the sugar producers.[88]

The fingerprinting bureau was one of the major services offered to individual factories by the JSWB. All permanent workers were fingerprinted and a copy sent to the central bureau, together with details of the worker's background and employment record. Initially, when the system operated on a local level only, neighbouring factories were able to check a person's background before employing him. If he had been involved in strikes, been branded as a troublemaker or dismissed by another factory, then the bureau would have these details on file. By 1929 the central fingerprinting bureau for the sugar industry in the JSWB offices in Surabaya had around 160,000 workers on file and was able to draw on information held by similar bureaus operated by railway, shipping and engineering companies.[89]

In the long term, the fingerprinting bureaus proved an important weapon with which large private industries in the Indies could exercise control over their workers. Those involved in strikes, in unions or in political activities could now be refused employment throughout the major industries in the colony. For skilled workers — the backbone of the PFB and of all unions — who were almost entirely dependent on the larger employers or on the government

industries for work, this was a powerful disincentive to involvement in unions or political parties.

TOWARDS A GENERAL STRIKE

THE PFB letter to the Sugar Syndicate in April 1920 threatened a general strike in the industry if its principal demands were not met. The Syndicate's refusal even to discuss these demands convinced PFB leaders that they must press ahead with plans for a general strike. The rash of spontaneous strikes at individual sugar factories had for the most part only partially achieved their immediate goals, but collectively they had convinced nervous managers and the Syndicate that wages and conditions had to be substantially improved if the 1920 milling season was not to be seriously disrupted. Surjopranoto realized, however, that the victories would be short lived as long as the Syndicate refused to recognize the PFB. He was increasingly concerned about the dismissal of sugar factory workers because of their PFB membership. Without recognition this victimization would continue. As well as creating hardships for individuals it would also weaken the PFB and eventually lead to its destruction because it would be seen by workers as unable to protect them against the factories. Recognition, then, was a crucial objective and had to be achieved quickly. Once gained, the PFB could look beyond short-term goals and concentrate on the long-term task of developing a strong, committed membership conscious of the industrial and welfare role of a modern labour union. Without recognition, the Syndicate would continue to organize factories to combat the PFB. In a colonial situation where in the end the government supported 'tranquillity and order' and the vested interests of Dutch capital, sooner or later this would bring about the PFB's downfall.

While convinced as early as May that a general strike had to be organized, Surjopranoto was well aware of the dangers involved in openly moving in this direction.[90] The PFB organization was considerably tighter than in 1919, but it was still responding to local pressures and locally led disputes rather than initiating and controlling action itself. Despite the appointment of extra consuls in 1920, the central executive still had only tenuous control over branch leaders. For example, no branch had bothered to heed Surjopranoto's instructions to inform the Yogyakarta headquarters in advance of calling a strike. Moreover, the union strike fund

was still very small and the Yogyakarta headquarters' was dependent on a regular flow of money from branches in order to keep the organization operating. In a general strike the PFB faced the real danger of running out of money in a matter of days. Support from other labour unions, particularly from those covering key industries such as the railways, the postal and telegraph service and the docks, together with support from the major political parties, was essential if a general strike was to have any chance of success.

A major obstacle to the PFB gaining support from other unions was the strained relations between Surjopranoto and Semaun in the labour federation, the PPKB. When the PPKB was formed in December 1919, great hopes were held that it would become the major coordinating body for the young labour movement. Instead, it fell victim to an increasingly bitter dispute between communist and non-communist union and political leaders. The major prize was control of Sarekat Islam, based in Surabaya under Tjokroaminoto's chairmanship. The Indies Communist Party (PKI) was formed in May 1920 by members of the Indies Social Democratic Association. Many who joined also remained members of Sarekat Islam, retaining dual membership as part of the PKI's united front from within strategy in the hope of gaining control of the only political organization with some measure of mass appeal. The communist and non-communist factions within Sarekat Islam had distinct geographical and union bases. The communists were led by Semaun, based in Semarang, and had created a strong constituency among urban workers in the railways, tramways, harbours and printing industry. The non-communists were led by Surjopranoto and Salim, based in Yogyakarta, and had control of two major unions, for pawnshop workers and sugar factory workers, as well as influence in others, including the teachers unions.

Since the PPKB's formation in December 1919, its provisional executive had been based in Semarang under Semaun's leadership. The PFB was slow to join the PPKB. At the closed meeting of the PFB executive in Yogyakarta in May, which discussed a possible general strike later in the year if the Sugar Syndicate did not respond favourably to their demands, Semaun testily raised this issue, asking whether or not the PFB intended to join as had been foreshadowed at the federation's formation. Surjopranoto reportedly replied that the PFB did not wish to join the PPKB for

the moment because it had no confidence in it: it was still not properly organized and its executive was chosen by Semaun himself. Semaun resented this personal attack, which brought to the surface the tension between him and Surjopranoto as well as the discord between the communist and non-communist factions within Sarekat Islam. Semaun acknowledged that it had been decided in December 1919 to hold a congress in April 1920 to elect a permanent executive, but argued that this had yet to occur, not through any machiavellian intent, but simply because the PPKB had no money. Labour unions which had promised to join had still not made financial contributions. The CSI chairman, Tjokroaminoto, anxious to prevent a split between the two men, resolved the dispute for the time being by undertaking personally to pay the cost of holding a PPKB congress in August.[91]

The PPKB duly met on 1 August at Semarang. Tjokroaminoto again played a critical moderating role between the principle antagonists, Semaun and Surjopranoto.[92] About 300 people were in attendance, representing twenty-two unions with a claimed membership of around 72,000. Semaun opened the meeting by giving a brief resume of the PPKB's history, regretting that nothing had been heard from many unions since the federation was formed nearly a year earlier and cautioning against wildcat strikes. The secretary of the provisional executive, Najoan, was more belligerent, emphasizing in his report that the creation of the PPKB had been the work of the communists and regretting that Surjopranoto had spurned its assistance during recent strikes in the sugar factories. At the conclusion of the official reports, Surjopranoto entered the debate by explaining the PFB's reluctance to join the federation. He was concerned, he said, that local PPKB executives could launch strikes affecting PFB members without the knowledge of the PFB central executive. Moreover, he believed that too much power was in the hands of the federation executive, especially in view of the fact that all of its members were communists. Although unstated, clearly this was his major objection at a time when competition between him and Semaun for the mantle of succession to Tjokroaminoto as CSI chairman was intense. Rather disarmingly, he concluded by saying that despite all its reservations the PFB was prepared to cooperate with the federation.[93]

In the debate that followed between Semaun and Surjopranoto the issues raised by both men in recent months were aired once more, with Surjopranoto urging that the PPKB central

executive move from Semarang to Yogyakarta because most of the major unions were based there. Tjokroaminoto drew the debate to a conclusion by stressing that he had been solidly behind Surjopranoto in the past few months in his difficult task and urging all present to cooperate with each other. If there was a PFB-organized general strike in the sugar industry then he urged the PPKB to throw its full support behind it. Later that evening a permanent executive was chosen, giving the chairmanship to Semaun and the vice-chairmanship to Surjopranoto, but moving the central executive to Yogyakarta. This decision to have its chairman in Semarang but its executive in Yogyakarta, as McVey has pointed out, only made it more difficult for the PPKB to be an active organization.

Two major issues were debated at the meeting. Firstly, the role of the Labour Commission established by the government and the importance of workers' gaining legally enforceable rights. Surjopranoto, who was a member of the Labour Commission, argued that little could be expected of it in terms of new labour laws to protect the workers, largely because the majority of its members were 'pro-capitalist', but that some good would emerge if it instituted inquiries into local conditions of workers. The meeting decided to establish a study group to consider putting a case to the government for the establishment of an Arbitration Board and for legally enforcing that after one year's temporary employment a worker had to be given permanency. Legally enforceable permanency of employment and an Arbitration Board when disputes emerged were seen by many union leaders as essential for the protection of workers.

The second major issue was the long-mooted general strike in the sugar industry. Surjopranoto introduced the matter by pointing out that most strikes in the sugar factories had been spontaneous actions by angry workers, forcing the PFB to become involved in order to give leadership. If the Sugar Syndicate did not accept a new PFB ultimatum about to be served on it, then a general strike would go ahead. He called for the full support of the PPKB. The meeting agreed to give this support but clearly Semaun did so reluctantly. Although not averse to the use of the strike weapon — which he had used to good effect in Semarang, particularly in the printing industry — he was well aware of the dangers involved in a society where union membership was often little more than nominal and where so much coercive power was

held by the State. His strategy as chairman of the VSTP, and in other unions in which he held influence, was to use the threat of a strike as a weapon but to try to achieve his ends through negotiations and compromise. He was clearly concerned that if the PFB issued an ultimatum to the Sugar Syndicate it might not be able to deliver on it — it was after all getting towards the end of the sugar milling season and many workers had received large wage rises already. A badly organized or poorly supported general strike would set the whole labour movement back many years. With these considerations in mind he told the meeting that he would circularize all unions in order to find out whether they would support a general strike in the sugar industry. This, he said, would take about two months to do, clearly implying that in the meantime the PFB should hold off any action. As the 1920 sugar milling season would be over in two months time, the further implication was that a general strike should not be organized until the beginning of the 1921 season.[94]

Nevertheless, a circular issued by the PPKB immediately after the meeting, signed by Semaun as well as Surjopranoto, urged all workers to support the PFB if a general strike occurred in the sugar industry:

> Workers in the Indies!
> Know that your duty is to support your class, your fellow workers and your group if it comes to a general struggle. *Stand ready and wait.* If there is a general strike then set up strike committees, especially in the vicinity of sugar factories in order to counter blacklegs. As well, organize financial support for the strikers so that the strike is not lost.[95]

The prospect of a general strike appeared to loom closer on 9 August when Surjopranoto sent a strongly worded ultimatum to the Sugar Syndicate. In it he argued that there was great unrest among workers in the sugar industry in Java and that the PFB leadership was under constant pressure from its members for a general strike. The unrest, he asserted, was a direct consequence of poor wages at a time when the cost of living had increased sharply, together with the refusal of sugar factory managers to discuss issues affecting workers with the PFB. He was critical of the comments by the chairman of the Sugar Syndicate in the Volksraad about the PFB, stating categorically that the last concern of the PFB was to create a revolution. Admittedly, there had

been many wildcat strikes, but 'these were in no sense proclaimed by the leaders of our Association, rather they are pure symptoms of the spirit of resistance among workers . . . '[96] Employers' attitudes in refusing to recognize the PFB and in rejecting workers' wishes, he asserted, had increased discontent and if there was no speedy resolution then a general strike would occur in the near future. He urged the Syndicate to organize a conference with the PFB and the PPKB and enclosed the detailed demands of the PFB, the crucial parts of which were its claim for official recognition and for a general wage rise. He warned that unless a favourable reply was received by 17 August a general strike would be proclaimed. The same day a circular was distributed throughout PFB branches informing members that if the Syndicate did not meet their demands then a general strike would indeed be called. Members were to prepare for a strike but await orders from the central executive:

> Comrades: the coming struggle is great and important. It means life or death for our livelihood. Therefore we must resist betrayal, we must not be weak of heart or in any way afraid. Even if the strike is won or the living conditions of workers improved in one factory, the strike must continue so that victory is achieved for all sugar factory workers in the whole of the Indies. Show no light-heartedness, no indifference and no timidity but be steadfast, with eyes fixed firmly on the goal.[97]

Formal preparations for a strike were put into train, with consuls appointed as PFB representatives to carry out the instructions of Surjopranoto and the Yogyakarta headquarters in the event of the strike being proclaimed.[98] Branch leaders were cautioned to do nothing until instructions were received from Yogyakarta, but if the strike occurred then strike-support committees should be set up to maintain morale and to ensure that there was no back-sliding. If the strike did occur, Surjopranoto assured branches that everything would be done to ensure that it was not defeated.[99]

The PFB central executive called off the general strike late on 17 August, even though the Syndicate had replied to its ultimatum reaffirming that it would not recognize the union.[100] Earlier that day Surjopranoto and Salim had been summoned by the Resident of Yogyakarta, asked if they intended to go ahead with the general strike, and warned that the government would not tolerate any

disturbance of the peace. Surjopranoto later claimed that the Resident threatened to have him arrested. But no arrest had been authorized by the Governor-General, or even contemplated as far as can be determined from the official records, nor had any decision been made to prohibit a general strike, except that bans had been placed on the holding of public meetings in the Yogyakarta and Madiun Residencies.

The PFB central executive appears to have been involved in a hard-nosed game of bluff with the Sugar Syndicate. When telephoned by the Assistant Resident of Yogyakarta on 16 August and asked what he thought would be the PFB decision on the proposed strike, Surjopranoto is reported to have replied, 'The general strike is not likely to go ahead, at least not in Yogya; we have sent an ultimatum to the Syndicate only to frighten it'.[101] Nevertheless, the pressure was maintained on the Syndicate. Twice, on 15 and 16 August, a worried Semaun had telegrammed Surjopranoto urging him to postpone the strike, convinced that it would fail, but Surjopranoto had firmly replied that it would go ahead as planned. Both telegrams were published by the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, the voice of the sugar industry. The same morning that he was summoned by the Resident of Yogyakarta, Surjopranoto telegrammed the Governor-General in an effort to increase the pressure on the Syndicate. The Governor-General was informed that the Syndicate had refused to meet with the PFB despite its efforts to achieve an amicable settlement and that if no way was found to persuade the Syndicate to alter its attitude then the PFB would be forced to go ahead with a general strike. The Governor-General was urged to try to avert this.[102]

Surjopranoto probably had little choice but to abandon plans for a general strike for the moment. No definite date had been set for the strike, but the expectation had been created that it would be sometime late in August. Despite its external confidence, the PFB organization was not disciplined enough to carry out a general strike successfully, nor did it have sufficient strike funds to sustain a strike for more than a few days. Support for a general strike would probably have been patchy at best. In sugar factories where significant improvements in wages and conditions had already been won, through strikes, managers' fears of strikes, or because of pressure from the local Resident, it was problematical if workers were sufficiently discontented to join in a general strike. Where strikes had occurred, they had been local actions over

concrete issues, such as wages or arbitrary treatment. Abstract issues like formal recognition of the PFB by the Syndicate were of vital importance to PFB leaders but of marginal appeal to sugar factory workers.

Publicly, Surjopranoto explained that the general strike had been called off because the Resident of Yogyakarta had informed him that it would be forbidden as a threat to 'tranquillity and order'. Nevertheless, he asserted, the PFB had not abandoned its plans to call a general strike, merely postponed them to a later date.[103] Privately, Surjopranoto claimed that the Resident of Yogyakarta had promised that the government would not permit PFB members to be dismissed simply because of their union membership and that this undertaking was a decisive factor in persuading him to call off the proposed strike.[104]

Over the next few months Surjopranoto maintained pressure on the government to honour what he claimed was its undertaking in August to protect sugar factory workers against victimization. He raised the issue in an audience with the Governor-General in October and came away with a promise that if the PFB submitted a list of names of individuals victimized then the government would investigate. However, while Surjopranoto seems to have believed that they were talking about all strikers who had been dismissed and not re-employed, the Governor-General was in fact referring only to those dismissed for no other reason than that they were PFB members. Accordingly, when the PFB submitted a list of 700 strikers not re-employed, the government requested it to indicate which were dismissed solely for joining the union.[105] Surjopranoto must have realized very quickly that he would receive little help from the government. Indeed, PFB members continued to be arbitrarily dismissed and when strikes occurred sugar factory managers selectively re-employed workers, often refusing re-employment to PFB activists.

The Governor-General had, however, raised the issue during an audience with S.J. Hirsch, chairman of the Sugar Syndicate, just two days before he received Surjopranoto and Salim. Hirsch, of course, denied that workers were being dismissed for being PFB members, arguing that they were simply not being re-employed after going on strike because they had been replaced by other workers. The Governor-General again urged the Syndicate to recognize the PFB, arguing that what employers aimed to win by not acknowledging the PFB they actually lost because Surjopra-

noto used non-recognition as a weapon to arouse the masses. Hirsch remained unmoved, stating that the Syndicate could not acknowledge the PFB because as it was connected with Sarekat Islam it was not a pure trade union. Moreover, acknowledgement of the PFB now would considerably increase Surjopranoto's power because it would be seen as a victory for him. Finally, he argued that recognition of the PFB would run the risk of the European *Suikerbond* cooperating with it and itself resorting to strike action instead of, as at the moment, remaining neutral during strikes and keeping the factories operating.[106] The Syndicate clearly scented a decisive victory over the PFB and was determined to stand firm, rejecting not only the idea of recognition but also the government's proposal for the establishment of a Labour Council for the industry, chaired by a government official with a representative from employers and employees. The Syndicate was convinced that its interests were best served by adopting an uncompromisingly tough policy towards Indonesian unions.

Privately, though, Hirsch admitted that the only way to solve the current labour disputes was for the industry 'to put more money on the table'. He further admitted that while acknowledgement of the PFB would not reduce the current labour disputes, nevertheless non-recognition could be a mistaken policy.[107] His private views were not shared by the majority of the Syndicate members and publicly there was no hint of a compromise on this issue.

THE DECLINE OF THE PFB

THE postponement of the general strike in August was a turning-point in the short history of the PFB. Much had been achieved in 1919 and 1920, with employers as well as government officials acknowledging that the considerable improvements in wages and conditions were largely the result of pressure from the PFB. Wages for skilled workers had more than doubled since 1918. Unskilled workers also made considerable gains but in general received lower percentage increases than the artisans.

It is no coincidence that the PFB was dominated by skilled workers and that it was skilled workers, realizing that they had some bargaining power with employers, who led the strikes in the factories. The factories seem to have realized that the PFB's growth depended on support from the skilled members of their

workforce and gave higher wage rises to these workers in order to try to detach them from the union. The sugar industry in 1920 could well afford to buy off its crucial skilled workforce. For nearly a decade it had enjoyed record prices, enabling it to pay rich dividends to shareholders in the Netherlands. The higher wages made only a small dent in overall profitability. It was a price worth paying in order to ensure that sugar continued to flow from Java to world markets where demand and therefore price was high.

Although the general strike was called off, local strikes continued in the last quarter of 1920 in much the same way as earlier in the year. At the end of 1920 the PFB claimed a total membership of 43,000, or nearly one in three of the permanent and seasonal workers in the sugar industry.[108] The figure was, however, grossly inflated, taking no account of those who had joined the union, paid one or more membership due, but since then made little or no further contributions. In fact, at the beginning of 1921 the PFB was desperately short of funds, which reflected the inactivity of branches since the end of the 1920 milling season. Workers' interest in the union had fallen away as quickly as it had first been aroused. At the PFB congress on 31 December and 1 January, Surjopranoto urged delegates to ensure that funds flowed more regularly to union headquarters in Yogyakarta. He had been forced to borrow f3,500 because of the failure of branches to send money to the central treasurer. The union needed f19,000 in order to pay the salaries of executive members and consuls and in order to pay the costs of running the central office. The cost of consuls' salaries alone was estimated at f12,000 annually.[109]

Such was the financial straits of the PFB, that in February 1921 consuls could not be paid and the salaries of teachers at the *Adidarmo* school in Yogyakarta were also in arrears. Moreover, the PFB was six months behind in paying the rent for its headquarters. From March stringent economies were introduced as it became clear that branches were unable to maintain their contributions to Yogyakarta. The PFB magazine, *Boeroeh Bergerak*, begun as a monthly publication late in 1919, was ended and courses for sub-consuls were also cancelled. Wages for PFB workers, including consuls, were reduced and the headquarters was moved from rented premises to a vacant room in the *Adidarmo* school.[110] As consuls became paid increasingly irregularly

so Yogyakarta control over them decreased and their enthusiasm for advancing the union understandably waned.

Nevertheless, Surjopranoto continued to urge branch leaders and consuls to prepare for a general strike in the 1921 milling season if the sugar industry continued with its refusal to recognize the union.[111] Surjopranoto and his leading consuls visited branches in order to try to breathe new life into their organization. They found that the executives of many branches had virtually ceased to operate, in some cases because their members, for the most part artisans at local factories, had not been re-employed after a strike. The sugar industry estimated that in two-thirds of the strikes in 1920 leaders were not re-employed when the strike was over. The increasingly efficient fingerprinting system made it almost impossible for them to gain work at other mills. Not able to gain work locally, they were forced to move elsewhere, leaving a vacuum in the local PFB leadership. Other skilled workers were reluctant to take their place for fear of meeting the same fate.[112] At other factories the branches had 'gone to sleep', to use Surjopranoto's own term, as soon as the factories had conceded major wage increases and improvements to conditions during the 1920 milling season.

There was no way in which the PFB could organize a general strike in 1921, as both the government and the sugar industry were well aware. Their only concern was that local consuls might go their own way, even more so than they had in 1919 and 1920, and that a series of local strikes might disrupt the season in some areas. Even these fears were unfounded. While in 1920 there had been seventy-two strikes involving 86,000 lost working days at the 160 sugar factories which were members of the Java Sugar Employers Association, in 1921 there were only seventeen involving 3,787 lost working days.[113] The twin process of identifying PFB propagandists, then dismissing them, and conceding wage rises, particularly for skilled workers, as soon as trouble threatened, was a successful tactic continued by an increasing number of sugar factory managers in 1921.[114]

Most of the strikes in 1921 followed the same pattern as in previous years, with the central issues being demands for higher wages and the reinstatement of workers dismissed by sugar factories. Some strikes, however, broke out because of workers' fears that factories were planning to renege on the agreements reached

in 1920 to pay a bonus of three months' wages in three instalments — before, during and immediately after the milling season. Where this issue arose, a manager simply replied that the Java Sugar Employers Association intended adopting a uniform bonus system for 1921 and subsequent years based on the general condition of the industry. Not all workers were satisfied with this reply, and a number of strikes occurred over the issue.

The malaise that had affected the PFB intensified through 1921, and when another milling season passed with the union further away than ever from recognition by the Sugar Syndicate, dissension within the union began to surface. A meeting was held in July at Purbolinggo, central Java, at which seventy-five members from the Bonjong branch of the PFB decided to break away from the Yogyakarta central executive and found a new organization, the *Sarekat Buruh Pabrikan* (SBP). A few days later, the PFB at the Klampok sugar factory also decided to break away from Yogyakarta to become a branch of the SBP.[115] In publicly justifying their action, the two branches explained that it was a culmination of increasing unhappiness with the PFB central executive. They had received no replies to letters sent to Yogyakarta, and when in March and April they had asked for a Yogyakarta representative to lead a public meeting nobody came. More importantly, they were critical of the central executive for causing a split in the labour union federation. They accused it of forgetting that sugar factory workers could only improve their lot by working arm in arm with other workers in one united labour movement.[116]

The break-away was followed in September by open schism within the ranks of the PFB central executive itself. A PFB conference was held at Yogyakarta on 20 September, attended not by Surjopranoto but by Sumodihardjo, the PFB secretary, Subroto, its treasurer, three commissioners and representatives of twelve branches. The meeting decided to dismiss Surjopranoto as president, accusing him of not carrying out his duties properly in recent months and of allowing the union organization to deteriorate. Those present formed themselves into a provisional central executive, subject to the next PFB congress confirming their decisions.[117] In a letter to all PFB branches, they ascribed the weakness of the PFB in the past year to the fact that money had not been coming into branches regularly: 'An organization without funds is like a tiger without teeth. . . '[118] The letter was published in the press, followed sometime later by a statement from the

second secretary of the PFB daily executive, S. Latti, that members should continue as usual because the dismissal of Surjopranoto was illegal owing to the fact that only five of the eleven executive members were present at the meeting in September.[119] The debate continued, but in reality it was a fight over a corpse. The PFB had virtually ceased to exist as a central organization and what branches did still exist showed only faint flickers of life.

The decline of the PFB as a significant force in the sugar factories had become part of the broader conflict between the Semarang communists and the Yogyakarta CSI leaders for control of Sarekat Islam and the political and trade union movement as a whole. The Purwokerto branch of the PFB took over leadership of the dissident branches, published its own broadsheet, the *Soeara Kaoem Boeroeh*, and tried to revive the union under its control. Members of its executive were closely linked to the Semarang communists, including among their members Subroto, Sudibio and Ngadino, all of whom were involved in a broad range of Semarang-based unions. Whether Semaun himself was actually involved in the schism is not known, but given the membership of the rival PFB Purwokerto executive it is difficult not to conclude that he was fully aware of and consulted about the turmoil. Indeed, in a private conversation with Yogyakarta detectives on 8 August 1920 Semaun reportedly had stated:

> If presently the general strike fails, then the PFB will not survive. If this is the case, I will establish a new PFB, and I will try to lead it in a sound manner, not, as at present, in a way which leaves the people victims after a strike and therefore antagonistic towards the executive.[120]

Throughout 1921 *Sinar Hindia* had repeatedly called on PFB members to overthrow Surjopranoto's decision to withdraw the PFB from the PPKB and had published a number of articles purporting to derive from various branches of the PFB and the Pawnshop Workers Union protesting against their leaders' decisions.[121] Surjopranoto never conceded the presidency of the PFB central executive; indeed early in 1922 he began again to try to revive the union in time for a further campaign against the factories during the approaching season. He had the numbers in the central executive, but stated his willingness to step aside provided someone could be found to take over in whom he had full confidence.[122] Clearly, he had no such confidence in the PFB Purwokerto

leaders nor in the leadership of the other eleven break-away branches.

CONCLUSION

SUPPORT for the PFB in the sugar factories fell away even more quickly than it had been gained. Workers had joined the union because they believed it would get them wage rises at a time when inflation was hurting them badly. The PFB central leadership failed to convert this initial enthusiasm into long-term commitment. The expansion of the union in 1919 and 1920 was so fast that its organizational structure was unable to keep pace. Leaders were forced to concentrate on immediate problems rather than develop the educational programmes that alone might have transformed sugar factory workers from other than merely nominal members.

On paper, the organizational structure of the PFB was impressive: a central executive and paid regional consuls supervising around 190 branches and an office staff in Yogyakarta preparing pamphlets, publishing a magazine and maintaining correspondence with branches, the Sugar Syndicate and the government. In practice, though, there was not one PFB but 190, each operating independently, with scant regard for the wishes of the Yogyakarta headquarters. Leadership at the branch level was in the hands of skilled workers and it was they who called the strikes or confronted sugar factory managers over demands for improved wages and conditions. They lived in the factory kampungs, worked alongside ordinary workers in the factories, and had institutional and personal powers of patronage and control. The Yogyakarta leaders, through their full-time consuls, struggled hard to assert control over them. Consuls and central executive leaders were 'outsiders', who occasionally entered the sugar factory kampungs to speak at locally organized meetings and then went away, leaving the PFB in the hands of locals. Later, they dashed back to try to quench the fires of strikes called by these local leaders in the name of the union. The PFB did not create discontent among sugar factory workers — the post-war inflation and the short-sightedness of the sugar industry did that; rather it tried to channel this discontent into a centrally controlled labour movement. Indeed, contrary to the assertions of the sugar industry, the PFB itself promoted very few strikes, preferring instead negotiation and compromise. When strikes were called by local leaders, PFB

consuls or Yogyakarta leaders most often acted as mediators between workers and managers in an effort to bring them to a resolution.

In the end, the PFB was outmanoeuvred by the sugar factories and the government. Once they realized the seriousness of the threat posed by the PFB, sugar factories raised wages sufficiently to blunt the union's major appeal. At the same time, PFB activists and strikers whose labour could be replaced were sacked and control over workers tightened through the establishment of a fingerprinting bureau. The sense of injustice among sugar factory workers was undiminished, but with their immediate wage grievances redressed, the artisans, who had been the backbone of the union, no longer considered it in their interests to be active in it. The gains achieved made the risks of further militancy no longer worthwhile. The abandonment of the general strike in August 1920, even before it could begin, was both a reflection of how much PFB support was ephemeral and limited to local ends and at the same time a cause of its momentum coming to a complete halt. In the more difficult political climate after 1921 it proved impossible to recreate the momentum of the immediate post-war years.

1. This and succeeding paragraphs on the workforce in the sugar mills is based on Levert, op. cit.
2. Ibid., p. 115.
3. Ibid., p. 114.
4. Ibid., p. 113.
5. Ibid., pp. 119-42.
6. Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248; S. Scherer, 'Harmony and Dissonance: Early Nationalist Thought in Java', MA Thesis, Cornell University, 1975, p. 66.
7. Adviser for Native Affairs to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248.
8. *Sinar Hindia*, 21 January 1919.
9. *Boeroeh Bergerak*, 15 March 1920.
10. *Sinar Hindia*, 21 January 1919.
11. Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248; PFB Circular to Directors and Managers of Cultivation Industries and the Executive of the Sugar Syndicate, March 1920, V 19 January 1921-67; 'Report on the PFB Congress, Yogyakarta, 31 December/1 January', by the Deputy Head of the General Detective Service (van der Lely), 22 January 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/128.
12. *Sinar Hindia*, 21 January 1919.

13. Assistant Resident of Cirebon to Resident of Cirebon, 31 July 1920, V 19 January 1921-67.
14. Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Appendix 2, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248; Acting Head of the General Detective Service (van der Lely) to Attorney-General, 30 June 1921, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 9 July 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/659.
15. Circular PFB Yogyakarta, November 1918, enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Appendix 3, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248.
16. For a discussion see McVey, op. cit., chapters 1-4.
17. For a discussion of the cane burning phenomenon see R. E. Elson, 'Cane-burning in the Pasuruan area: an expression of social discontent', in F. van Anrooij et. al.(eds.), *Between People and Statistics. Essays on Modern Indonesian History* (The Hague, 1979), pp. 219-34.
18. This strike wave is discussed in detail in Djoko Utomo, 'Pemogokan Buruh Tani di Abad ke-19: Kasus Yogyakarta', *Prisma* 12, 8 (August 1983), pp. 68-78.
19. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 10 June 1918; Minutes of the Meeting of Chairmen of Departments and Groups of the General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies, 24 September 1928, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6754; *Oetoesan Hindia*, 10 June 1918.
20. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 15 and 16 July 1918.
21. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 25 July 1918.
22. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 23 March 1918.
23. 'Short Report on the strike at the Brangkal sugar mill' by the Manager, J. Kilian, 23 March 1918[sic], enclosed in, Chairman General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies to Chairman Association of Netherlands-Indies Sugar Employers, 27 March 1919, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6755.
24. This figure was given by the Chief Agent of the Koloniale Bank. See: Chief Agent Surabaya to Directors Amsterdam, conf. No 1879, April 1919, Koloniale Bank Archives, Box 121.

    The Chief Agent argued that, 'This strike was broken by the wives of the striking artisans, who while agreeing with their refusal to work also believe that their men must provide the food needed every day'.
25. See, for example, a Circular from Surjopranoto, 15 November 1919, in the name of both the PFB and the newly formed Revolutionaire Socialistische Vakcentrale, enclosed in V 19 January 1921–67.
26. See: Minutes of the Meetings of Chairmen of the Departments and Groups of the General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies, in BENISO, 1919-26, NHM Archives, Boxes 6754-6768.
27. See: Minutes of the Meetings of Chairmen of the Departments and Groups of the General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies, 24 September 1918, BENISO, 1919, NHM Archives, Box 6754; Chief Agent Surabaya to Directors Amsterdam, Conf. No 1846, 12 March 1919, Koloniale Bank Archives, Box 121.
28. This information was kindly supplied by Robert Elson who has written a comprehensive study of the impact of sugar cultivation on Pasuruan, east

Java, entitled *Javanese Peasants and the Colonial Sugar Industry; Impact and Change in an East Java Residency 1830–1940* (Kuala Lumpur, 1984).

29. Notes of a Meeting of the Central Executive of the General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies, 11 December 1918, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6755.
30. Extracts of Notes of the Daily Executive of the General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies, 20 August 1919, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6754.
31. Chairman Beniso to Members, 14 July 1919, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6755.
32. See: *Boeroeh Bergerak*, 15 March 1920; *Oetoesan Hindia*, 10 January 1920, 22 January 1920, 24 March 1920, 17 April 1920 and 27 April 1920.
33. Cited in: Extracts of Notes of the Daily Executive of the General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies, 20 August 1919, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6754.
34. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 9 January 1920; *Sinar Hindia*, 8 January 1920.
35. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 9 January 1920.
36. Enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Appendix 5, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248.
37. Ibid., Appendix 7.
38. J.J. Tichelaar, 'De Werkstakingen in de Suikerindustrie op Java Gedurende Het Jaar 1920,' Archief voor de Suikerindustrie in Nederlandsch-Indie 1921, pp. 245-8, 283-8.
39. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 20 February, 1 and 4 March 1920.
40. The newly formed PFB branch at the Buduran sugar mill in Sidoardjo obtained an increase of 15 per cent and an extra month's bonus for 1919 and 1920. The managers of the Gempol and Ardjawinangun sugar factories in Cirebon Residency increased their wages 50 per cent on learning of Surjopranoto's imminent arrival to address workers at their factories.
Oetoesan Hindia, 1 April 1920; Assistant Resident of Cirebon to Resident of Cirebon, 31 July 1920, V 19 January – 67.
41. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 30 March 1920.
42. *Sinar Hindia*, 17 February 1920.
43. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 17 February 1920.
44. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 24 February 1920; *Sinar Hindia*, 13 March 1920.
45. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 10 March 1920, V 19 January 1921–67.
46. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 10 and 12 March 1920.
47. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 12 March 1920.
48. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 27 March 1920.
It was reported that the house of one of the leaders of the Krian strike (a tukang named Tosari) was guarded by a policeman each night of the strike for fear he might go out and harrass strike-breakers. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 24 March 1920.
49. Cultuur Maatschappij 'Balong Bendo' to Secretary Beniso, Amsterdam, 2 July 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757.
50. Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248.
51. PFB Circular to all Directors and Managers of Cultivation Industries and

the Executive of the Sugar Syndicate, March 1920, enclosed in V 19 January 1921–67.

52. Central Executive of the PFB to Executive of the Sugar Syndicate, 14 April 1920, V 19 January 1921–67.
53. Chairman of the Executive of the General Syndicate of Sugar Mills in the Netherlands-Indies to Central Executive of the PFB, n.d., V 19 January 1921–67.
    Hirsch was a member of the Volksraad and repeatedly condemned the PFB in 1919 and 1920. In a letter to the Chairman of the Association of Netherlands Indies Sugar Employers he described the PFB in the following terms: 'The PFB is nothing other than an enterprise of Surjopranoto, with thousands of members who are subjected to his will, and to his will alone, and who he must maintain in a state of agitation and discontent if he is not to lose his bread — that is the contributions of the members'. S.J. Hirsch to Raemer, 19 August 1920, enclosed in Secretary Beniso to Members No B 81, 28 September 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757.
54. Soerabaiasche Handelsblad, 24 April 1920; 'Short Report on the Sugar Syndicate meeting at Surabaya on 13 April 1920', enclosed in Confidential letter Batavia Factory to Secretariat. Amsterdam, No 2119, 20 April 1920, NHM Archives, Box 2719.
55. Chief Agent Surabaya to Directors Amsterdam, conf. no 1893/2, 15 April 1920, Koloniale Bank Archief, Box 121.
56. Circular General Secretary Sugar Syndicate, 1 April 1920, V 19 January 1921–67.
57. Government Secretary to Residents, 28 March 1920, No. 269x, V 19 January 1921–67.
58. See, telegram Sugar Syndicate Executive to Governor-General, 14 April 1920, V 19 January 1921–67.
59. See, Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 27 April 1920, V 19 January 1921–67.
60. Ibid.
61. Comment of the Chairman of the Cirebon Department of the Sugar Syndicate, in 'Notes of the meeting on 10 April 1920 held at the Residency Office at Cirebon', V 19 January 1921–67.
62. 'Notes of the meeting on 10 April 1920 held at the Residency Office at Cirebon', V 19 January 1921–67.
63. See, V 19 January 1921-67, passim.
64. Resident of Surakarta to Governor-General, 6 June 1920, V 19 January 1921–67.
65. See, Notes of a Meeting of the Superintendent and the 13 Sugar Factory Managers on 30 April and 2 May 1920, enclosed in Confidential Letter, Batavia Factory to Amsterdam Secretary, No 2126, 6 May 1920, NHM Archive, Box 2719.
66. See, Chairman Beniso to Members, 7 July 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757.
67. See, 'Report from Aneta', enclosed in Secretary BENISO to Members, 20 July 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757.
68. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 4 June 1920; *Sinar Hindia*, 3 June 1920.
69. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 22 May 1920.

70. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 15 June 1920.
71. *Sinar Hindia*, 1 June 1920.
72. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 18 May 1920.
73. See, Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 23 March 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/378.
74. *Sinar Hindia*, 12 May 1920.
75. Resident of Madiun to Attorney-General, 28 July 1920, V 19 January 1921–67.
76. Tichelaar, op. cit., p. 317.
77. *Locomotief*, 21 September 1920.
78. See reports on the Council of Elders in: *Oetoesan Hindia*, 13 April 1920; Resident of Pekalongan to Governor-General, 31 July 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/881; Assistant Resident of Cirebon to Resident, 31 July 1920, V 19 January 1921-67.
79. *Locomotief*, 21 September 1920.
80. Chief Agent to Directors of the Koloniale Bank, conf. 1876, 4 December 1919, Koloniale Bank Archief. Box 121.
81. *Sinar Hindia*, 10 May 1920.
82. *Sinar Hindia*, 14 April 1920.
83. *Sinar Hindia*, 8 May 1920.
84. *N.V. Machinefabriek 'Braat' te Soerabaia. Verslag over het Tiende Boekjaar 1919-1920*, p. 4.
85. *N.V. Machinefabriek 'Braat' te Soerabaia. Verslag over het Elfde Boekjaar 1920-1921*, pp. 6-8.
86. See, for example, Telegram, Resident of Pekalongan to Governor-General, 3 August 1920. Secret Mail Report 1920/881.
87. Ibid.
88. Secretary Java Sugar Employers Association to Beniso, No. 144, 26 August 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757.
89. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 20 October 1929.
90. See, 'Secret Report on the PFB and the SI at Yogyakarta, May 1920', General Detective Service, 17 May 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/725.
91. 'Report on a closed meeting of the PFB at Yogyakarta on 9 May 1920', in, ibid.
92. McVey, op. cit., pp. 91-2.
93. 'Report on a public meeting of the Vakcentrale at Semarang, 1 August 1920', Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 21 August 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/976.
94. Ibid.
95. Circular Vakcentrale to all unions and workers, dated 1 August 1920, enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Appendix 9, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248.
96. Surjopranoto, Chairman of the PFB, to Chairman of the Sugar Syndicate at Surabaya, 9 August 1920, enclosed in Adviser for Native Affairs (Kern) to Governor-General, 29 September 1920, Appendix 10, Secret Mail Report 1920/1248.
97. Enclosed in Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 20 August 1920, V 19 January 1921-67.
98. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 12 August 1920.

99. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 14 August 1920.
100. Chairman Java Sugar Employers Association (Hirsch) to Central Executive PFB, 17 August 1920, enclosed in Secretary BENISO to members, No B81, 28 September 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757.
101. Assistant Resident of Yogyakarta to Resident, 25 October 1920, enclosed in Resident of Yogyakarta to Government Officer for General Matters in the Volksraad, 27 October 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1311.
102. Telegram, Surjopranoto to Governor-General, 17 August 1920, V 19 January 1921-67. See also, Surjopranoto, 'Tentoekan dan tetapkanlah haloean', *Sinar Hindia*, 6 November 1920.
103. 'Ma'loemat Pendek', by Surjopranoto, *Sinar Hindia*, 24 August 1920.
104. See, Chairman (Surjopranoto) and Secretary (Salim) PFB to Governor-General, 26 January 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/150. The Resident of Yogyakarta denied making any such suggestion. See, Government Secretary to Resident of Kediri, 2 December 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1311.
105. Government Secretary to Central Executive PFB, 11 January 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/52; Surjopranoto (Chairman) and Salim (Secretary) PFB to Governor-General, 26 January 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/150.
106. 'Audience with the Governor-General on 18 October 1920', by S.J. Hirsch, enclosed in Secretary BENISO to Members, No B124, 7 December 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757. Hirsch stated that: 'According to the Governor-General this recognition was necessary because our standpoint cannot be defended, owing to the fact that public opinion condemns it and that among younger Javanese there is such a boundless hatred of the sugar industry'.
107. S.J. Hirsch to J.W. Raemer, Chairman BENISO, 29 July 1920, enclosed in Secretary BENISO to Members, No 75, 9 September 1920, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6757.
108. Report on the PFB Congress, Yogyakarta, 31 December 1920/1 January 1921, enclosed in Report of the Deputy Chief of the General Detective Service, 22 January 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/128.
109. Report on the PFB Congress, Yogyakarta, 31 December 1920/1 January 1921, enclosed in report of the Deputy Chief of the General Detective Service, 22 January 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/128.
110. Acting Head of the General Detective Service to Attorney-General, 30 June 1921, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 9 July 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/659.
111. See, Surjopranoto's speech at a meeting of PFB leaders at the house of Salim, Yogyakarta, on 9 November 1920, in Resident of Surakarta to Governor-General, 12 November 1920, Secret Mail Report 1920/1267.
112. See, Tichelaar, op.cit., p. 318 and reports in *Oetoesan Hindia*, 2 March and 19 May 1921.
113. *Archief voor de Suikerindustrie in Nederlandsch-Indie*, Verslag, Vol 31, Part 2, 1923, p. 911.
114. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 10 June 1921, Secret Mail Report 1921/613.
115. *Soeara Kaoem Boeroeh*, 1 August 1921.
116. *Soeara Kaoem Boeroeh*, 15 August 1921.
117. *Soeara Ra'jat*, 1 October 1921.

118. *Sinar Hindia*, 22 September 1921, in *IPO* 39 (1921), pp. 17-8.
119. *Sinar Hindia*, 8 October 1921, in *IPO* 41 (1921), p. 101.
120. Secret Detective Report, Yogyakarta, 9 August 1920, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 12 August 1920, V 19 January-67.
121. See, *IPO* (1921).
122. *Locomotief*, 1 February 1922.

V
Strikes and Defeat

THE downturn in the economy changed the industrial and political climate in the Indies. During the post-war boom, employers were prepared to concede improvements in conditions in order to minimize disruptions to their industries. Profits were high, skilled labour in short supply and higher costs could be absorbed or passed on. From the middle of 1921 a different mood was evident. Employers had begun to organize themselves and, as the economy softened, adopted a tougher approach to their workers. Workers now found it much harder to force wage rises; indeed they were hard pressed to prevent employers reducing gains made in the previous three years.

The deterioration of the colonial economy and the better coordination of employers coincided with a much tougher approach to labour unions by the Indies government. The relatively liberal Governor-General van Limburg Stirum was replaced in September 1921 by the far more conservative Governor-General Fock. Van Limburg Stirum's administration had largely resisted pressure from the European community for strong action against Indonesian political and union organizations. Indeed, his Residents had often openly intervened during labour disputes, pressuring employers to recognize that wages were lagging a long way behind the inflation rate. Fock was far less concerned about nurturing the growth of Indonesian organizations, whether political or industrial. During his five year administration a battery of repressive laws was enacted, designed to restrict and repress them. The government now had little sympathy for political and industrial agitation, abandoned its neutral position and actively sided with employers.

EMPLOYERS, GOVERNMENT AND WORKERS

The burgeoning of Indonesian political organizations, the growth of labour unions and the escalation of strikes forced the Indies government to take a more active role in the relationship between labour and management. In 1918 and 1919 many officials had been advising that wages were far too low. They attributed the post-war strike wave to the impoverishment of wage earners and argued that the government should intervene to persuade employers to pay better wages. The newly created Volksraad added its voice to demands for more equitable native working conditions and wages. Many of the non-official members of the Volksraad, both Indonesian and European, used the chamber to draw attention to social and economic injustices in the colony.[1] Denied a legislative function, in its first three years the Volksraad was the initiator of many important debates on political, social and economic issues, exerting considerable pressure on the colonial government to reconsider its policies. Subsequent Volksraads lacked the same vitality, largely because by then many of the most active and vociferous nationalists had decided to boycott it.

In response to these pressures, in 1919 Governor-General van Limburg Stirum created a number of commissions to investigate social and economic issues. One of the more important was a commission to inquire into the feasibility of establishing minimum wage rates in Java. While the government eventually decided against adopting the commission's recommendations for the introduction of legal minimum wages — largely on the grounds that they would be impossible to police — it did use its detailed findings as a basis for exerting pressure on employers in 1920 and 1921. Workers' success in obtaining wage improvements in these years owed much to the government's attitude, often neutral but sometimes quietly pressing employers to attend to legitimate grievances.

While the Indies government was generally sympathetic towards workers' grievances, it was at the same time concerned about the growth of labour unions and the use of the strike weapon. In the latter half of 1919 opinions were sought from key Batavian officials on whether the right to strike should be restricted. Most took the view that the government had to distinguish carefully between political strikes and strikes caused by economic grievances.

After canvassing his officials and seeking the advice of the Council for the Indies, van Limburg Stirum decided in July 1920 not to prohibit strikes but to change the law in such a way as to enable the government to intervene in strikes which seriously threatened the colonial economy. A general railway strike was cited as falling in this category.[2] The changes to the Penal Code in September 1920 strengthened the government's powers of preventive detention.[3] In conjunction with existing clauses, the government was now able to move at will against labour union or political leaders.

For the moment, the government set aside ideas of prohibiting strikes altogether. It was, however, sufficiently concerned by the wildcat strikes in the railways in 1920, and by the VSTP's threat of a general strike, to prepare contingency plans.[4] Local military commanders, police superintendents and managers of railway networks joined with Residents in preparing detailed plans in the event of a general strike. Residents were empowered to requisition private motor vehicles if necessary in order to move goods and mail and arrangements were made for the transport of fuel.[5] The contingency plans even requested the Director of the Pawnshop Service to inform the Attorney-General immediately if there was a sudden extraordinary increase in the number of goods being pawned. This might be an indication that workers were preparing for a major strike.[6] The detailed contingency plans drawn up from late 1920 were used to good effect during the railway strike in May 1923.

The government was particularly concerned about the severe labour problems in the railway industry because the railways were the backbone of the export economy. Its attempts to resolve these labour problems by establishing a Conciliation Council were, however, frustrated by the reluctance of private railway companies to be involved with a body which had more than advisory powers. The private companies and the State Railways were in agreement that a Conciliation Council was inappropriate in a colonial situation. They argued that it would weaken employers' positions because it would prevent them from taking immediate counteraction against strikes with no certainty that a decision would be in their favour. As well, the weakness of labour unions in the Indies meant that there was no guarantee that union leaders could enforce strike bans imposed by a Conciliation Council.[7]

The railway companies were not alone in their opposition to

the establishment of Conciliation Councils. Discussions were held with other major employer groups in 1921 but the idea was given a cold reception by employers and by most Residents on Java. While many Residents had urged employers to raise the wages of their Indonesian workers, they shared employers' opinion that a Conciliation Council was inappropriate for a colony. In the face of this opposition, the concept of Conciliation Councils was set aside, and with the tougher approach to labour unions after 1921, never again seriously considered. However, the government did establish a Labour Commission in February 1919, partly in response to a motion adopted by the Volksraad. The Labour Commission's task was to monitor labour conditions and investigate specific industries as instructed by the Governor-General. It was the Labour Commission, for example, that investigated the causes of the strike in the Semarang-Cirebon Railway Company in August 1920. At the end of 1921, the Commission was transformed into a *Kantoor van de Arbeid* (Labour Office), with a larger staff and broader functions, including collecting labour statistics, preparing new labour laws, inspecting working conditions in factories and workshops and surveillance of the labour movement. The *Kantoor van de Arbeid* had little power within the Indies government but did become a major source of reliable information, preparing detailed reports on major strikes and instigating thorough inquiries into a number of industries in the colony.

Just as the 1918–20 strike wave had forced the Indies government to intervene more directly in labour relations, so it persuaded major employers of the benefits of closer cooperation and coordination. The Sugar Syndicate and its Netherlands parent body the *Bond van Eigenaren van in Nederlandsch-Indie gelegen Suikerondernemingen* (Association of Owners of Netherlands-Indies Sugar Factories — BENISO) promoted the interests of the sugar industry, while similar coordinating bodies were established for Cultivation Owners (1918) and railway companies (1917). Service and manufacturing industry in the major cities formed city-wide associations in the late 1910s and early 1920s, including the engineering, printing and tailoring industries. The example of the sugar industry in instituting fingerprinting of employees and central fingerprinting bureaus was followed by other employer groups in an effort to control native workers more closely. The employer associations and the *Ondernemersraad voor Nederland-Indie* (Association of Employers in the Netherlands-Indies —

established in The Hague in 1921) became powerful pressure groups on colonial and metropolitan governments, defending the interests of capital and pressing for stronger controls of Indonesian labour unions and political organizations.

THE LABOUR FEDERATION

THE heated debate between Semaun and Surjopranoto in 1920 about the PPKB reflected the wider struggle for control of Sarekat Islam and the growing distrust between the communist and non-communist factions. After Semaun's telegrams in August 1920 urging Surjopranoto to call off the planned general strike in the sugar factories, any chance of cooperative action in the PPKB finally disappeared. On 22 October the PFB decided no longer to work with the communists in the federation. This decision was made only two days after Surjopranoto and Salim had had an audience with the Governor-General — a coincidence which did not escape the attention of a correspondent to *Sinar Hindia*, the voice of the Semarang Sarekat Islam and PKI leaders.[8] The correspondent wondered what advice the Governor-General had offered Surjopranoto and Salim and whether withdrawal from the PPKB was a clever ruse to gain recognition from the Sugar Syndicate, which had continually justified its non-recognition of the union on the grounds of its involvement with a communist organization.

In his public justification of the PFB's withdrawal from the federation, Surjopranoto referred to the critical attitude of the Semarang communists towards the PFB in general and himself in particular, as well as towards other CSI leaders. He was especially critical of an article written by a Semarang communist, Darsono, which accused Tjokroaminoto of misappropriating CSI funds. The PFB August ultimatum to the Sugar Syndicate was composed with support from Semaun and Bergsma, yet, complained a bitter Surjopranoto, twice Semaun had telegrammed the PFB calling on it not to strike because it would be defeated. These telegrams had irreparably weakened the PFB's negotiating position. He concluded that neither he nor the PFB wanted any longer to work with the communists: 'We feel that we are not able to work with a comrade who can suddenly hinder or destroy our work and then attack us like an opponent bearing a grudge if we do not go along with his wishes'.[9]

Semaun and Bergsma replied in the pages of *Sinar Hindia*,

partly in conciliatory tones but partly also in tones of anger.[10] The PPKB, they argued, was potentially the most powerful weapon in the workers' struggle against employers, yet Surjopranoto and Salim were trying to destroy this hard-won unity. They argued that Darsono's criticism of CSI leaders had nothing to do with the PPKB, which was not a political party but a grouping of trade unions. Further, they defended Semaun against accusations that the Sugar Syndicate had rejected the PFB ultimatum and refused to hold discussions with it simply because it had received copies of Semaun's telegrams to Surjopranoto. Semaun was not opposed to strike action, they said, merely to its timing.

While Surjopranoto stated that the PFB would withdraw immediately from the PPKB, it did not, in fact, do so. Instead, the PPKB staggered on with little money, few activities and an executive made up of two warring factions which continued privately and publicly to dispute the issues that divided them. At a meeting of the CSI executive in Yogyakarta in January 1921, after Semaun had restated his interpretation of his telegrams to Surjopranoto the previous August, Salim injected a much-needed note of realism into the proceedings by urging an end to the discord, reportedly describing the quarrels between Tjokroaminoto and Darsono on the one hand and Semaun and Surjopranoto on the other hand as 'the work of small children'.[11] The Indonesian press revelled in the quarrels: barely a week passed without every major newspaper reporting the latest attack or printing a new rebuttal.

The dispute came to a head in June 1921 at a conference in Yogyakarta called by the Union of Native Public Works Employees (VIPBOW) to discuss the quarrels in the federation which had led to its complete inactivity. The old arguments were repeated but, as Ruth McVey has described in detail, Surjopranoto and his Yogyakarta colleagues completely outmanoeuvred the Semarang communists and took control of the federation. The communists reacted immediately by forming a rival federation, the *Revolutionaire Vakcentrale* (Revolutionary Federation of Trade Unions), taking with them unions under their influence, including the VSTP, the *Havenarbeidersbond* and the *Typografenbond*.[12] In a manifesto widely circulated in the Indonesian press, Semaun explained the events which had led to the PPKB split. The new federation was called revolutionary, he insisted, not because it wanted to create an uprising or a revolution, but because it wanted to differentiate itself from the old federation.[13]

For nearly a year the pages of *Oetoesan Hindia* and *Sinar Hindia*, under CSI and PKI control respectively, had fought a bitter battle of words, a battle whose weapons were as much personal abuse as debate over ideological differences. A CSI congress in March 1921 raised the issue of party discipline and a special congress in October formally adopted it. Henceforth, members of Sarekat Islam could no longer be members of other political organizations. The communists were forced to resign and devote their energies to strengthening the PKI in total opposition to Sarekat Islam. There were now two openly competing political parties, each with a labour federation under its control.

Just as the PPKB had failed to realize its founders' dreams, so the two competing labour federations achieved little. Tjokroaminoto and Salim urged unions close to Sarekat Islam to breathe new life into the PPKB now that the communists had left, but to no avail. Likewise, the Revolutionary Federation of Trade Unions could do little more than issue manifestos urging moral and material support for striking workers. Unions were preoccupied with internal problems, and the limited leadership talent was fully stretched coping with a large number of individual unions.

As the heat generated by the dispute between communists and non-communists in 1921 dissipated, and as wounded egos recovered, there was a slow realization that two competing labour union federations would only further weaken the labour movement at a time when the economic recession and a more hostile government were taking their toll. By the middle of 1922, the Indonesian press was reporting conciliatory moves by both federations, and articles extolling the virtues of one united federation began to appear regularly in both PKI and Sarekat Islam newspapers. On 3 September 1922 a meeting at Madiun saw the two federations agree to fuse into a new organization, the *Persatuan Vakbond Hindia* (PVH).[14] The initiative was taken by Suroso, the chairman of the VIPBOW and acceptable to both groups as a neutral person for chairmanship of the new federation. The VIPBOW was well organized and in better financial shape than any other labour union because the recession had little affected its membership base. The PVH executive was, in fact, identical to that of the VIPBOW with the VIPBOW providing the administrative base in Mojokerto and the money necessary to run the organization.

By the end of the year, the PVH claimed a membership of 18

unions, representing 32,120 workers.[15] The PVH proved no more effective in coordinating labour unions than its predecessors, but at least it did bring an end to much of the public in-fighting between PKI and Sarekat Islam union leaders. Dissimilarities in the structures of the various labour unions, the preoccupation of most leaders with the problems of integrating their own branches, and the personal and ideological differences between leaders at the 'national' level, made such federations premature.

Many companies responded to the economic recession from the middle of 1921 by reducing wages and retrenching labour. Hitherto, almost all strikes had been caused by workers' attempts to improve their lot in the face of rampant inflation. Now they occurred on an equally wide scale as urban workers fought wage reductions and retrenchments. There were a number of major strikes in the recession years, including one in August 1921 which closed down the Surabaya harbour.[16] The two largest were in the pawnshops early in 1922 and in the railways in 1923. Both were crushed by employers and government working in concert. Their failure was a major turning point in the development of the labour movement. It made workers in the pawnshops and on the railways more wary of joining labour unions and forced union leaders to re-think their strategy in the light of increasingly restrictive laws and regulations.

THE PAWNSHOP WORKERS' STRIKE

THE Peyrott Report of February 1921, commissioned by the Governor-General in June 1920 after the unrest in the pawnshops, had done nothing to alleviate the accumulated grievances of pawnshop workers. It had, however, acknowledged that relations between Indonesians and Europeans in the pawnshops had deteriorated and had recommended some decentralization of decision-making in order to improve them. The response of the Head of the Pawnshop Service, Nittel, was to blame the PPPB for any discontent:

> . . . I believe that in reality the discontent and agitation among native pawnshop employees is limited to a few hundred hotheads, for the most part younger officers, who, under the influence of union and nationalist leaders, propagandize their revolutionary ideas and who, in my opinion, will continue this propaganda, despite any reforms which may be carried out in the management of the service.[17]

When the Governor-General acted on Peyrott's report in October, ordering reorganization of the Pawnshop Service so that most of the direct relations with Indonesians was decentralized to inspectors, Nittel continued to argue that there were theoretical advantages only in the change. But he did see one potential practical benefit. The central management of the Pawnshop Service could reduce contact with the PPPB on the grounds that individual problems were now the province of local inspectors. He could not refrain from pointing out the hidden benefit to the Governor-General: '. . . it is very possible that the power of the PPPB will be broken by this division, thereby vindicating here the ancient slogan of "divide and rule"'.[18]

The PPPB central executive also considered the Peyrott Report at some length and responded by reiterating the twenty-one demands adopted by its 1920 congress. The Peyrott Report, it argued:

> . . . will be seen in broad circles of labour unions and kindred organizations as clear proof that here as elsewhere 'improvements in the lot of those underneath is a power — not a legal — question; also that the party on top shows as little readiness to compromise here as elsewhere, indeed even greater unwillingness can be expected of it.[19]

A proclamation on the front page of *Oetoesan Hindia* further developed this theme. The only way people at the base of colonial society could improve their position, it argued, was by the exercise of power. In the past three years it had been forced on three occasions to threaten strikes unless its demands were met: each time it had won. It implied that the threat of a general strike might be the only way workers could get justice.[20]

Meetings with the Governor-General in May and the central management of the Pawnshop Service at the end of June gave Yogyakarta leaders little cause for confidence that their demands would be met.[21] It was in a sombre mood that PPPB leaders organized the union's fifth congress at Yogyakarta early in July, knowing full well that members were increasingly restive. The deterioration of the colonial economy, the evils of capitalism and the impoverishment of Indonesian workers were themes addressed by PPPB regional and central leaders and by representatives of other major unions, the most prominent of whom were Semaun and Surjopranoto.

For some months, branches had been preparing lists of topics for discussion, including detailed grievances as well as broader demands for better pay and conditions. The Peyrott Report was discussed at length, with general condemnation of its insensitivity to pawnshop workers' grievances. The major decisions of the congress concerned the union's attitude to the report. It decided to cooperate with other unions of government workers in a campaign to gain new employment regulations, and urged the Labour Union Federation to organize a meeting as soon as possible. Further, it instructed the central executive to formulate detailed plans for a Grievance Commission for despatch to the Governor-General. Finally, it resolved that if all other avenues of redress were exhausted, the PPPB should organize a general strike, to last several months if necessary.[22]

The widespread discontent among pawnshop workers was further increased in late July, when the Head of the Pawnshop Service issued a circular stating that, owing to the downturn in the colonial economy, there would be an excess of 306 workers by the end of October. The Pawnshop Service denied that retrenchments were being considered, but certainly workers in east and central Java, where the overmanning was concentrated, were asked if they were prepared to be transferred to pawnshops or other government departments in west Java and Sumatra.[23] The threat of retrenchment, involuntary transfer or demotion to lower-status jobs were major topics of discussion at PPPB branches in the latter part of 1921, with growing pressure on the Yogyakarta central executive to take industrial action. Many branches told the central executive that if it did not do something soon they would launch action at the local level. Yogyakarta leaders were sufficiently concerned at the possibility of local action that late in September they publicly drew members' attention to the dangers of a badly organized strike. The manifesto stated that a letter had been sent to all branches seeking answers to two basic questions, which it was hoped would provide a clear indication of the strength of the opposition to threatened redundancies. Branches were asked, firstly, whether they wanted to strike and, secondly, how many members wanted to strike and how many did not.[24]

Branches' responses were coordinated by the middle of October: 2,972 members were in favour of a general strike, while 692 said they would not take part in a strike. The results were circulated to strike agents appointed by each branch. They were urged

to continue their educational work in order to ensure that members were ready for a strike should it become necessary.[25] PPPB leaders focused on the threatened retrenchments as they went around the branches, urging solidarity and preparedness for a strike. At the end of September, for example, Abdul Muis told a meeting of 150 pawnshop workers that there should be a general strike immediately a single worker was made redundant. He was opposed to strikes over issues such as wages, but redundancies were a much more important issue, warranting drastic action.[26]

The long-standing unrest in the pawnshops finally came to a head in January 1922 over the circular requiring pawnshop assistants to carry goods from the warehouses to the stores. Under the economy measures introduced from the middle of 1921, permanent labourers were no longer employed at pawnshops from 1 January 1922, but on auction days local managers were authorized to hire casual labourers.[27] At the Ngupasan pawnshop in Yogyakarta city the first auction for the year was scheduled for 10 January. The manager decided that the hire of temporary labourers was not necessary and on the day of the auction reminded his deputy, a Javanese named Suparno, that small items must be brought from the warehouse by pawnshop assistants themselves. Suparno asked to be allowed to organize labourers to do the work, as was the usual practice, but this was refused. Disagreeing with his manager's orders, and possibly more aware than him of the resentment it would create among pawnshop assistants, Suparno ignored them and hired a labourer for the job. Annoyed that his instructions had been disobeyed, that afternoon the manager again instructed Suparno that pawnshop assistants were to do the work themselves. The following morning, 11 January, the manager went to the display room to enforce his ruling. There he met a pawnshop assistant named Bawadi who asked to be allowed to pay a labourer out of his own pocket to carry goods from the warehouse. This was refused and Bawadi instructed to do the work himself. Bawadi stood his ground, refused to do the work himself, and was suspended.

The manager had asserted his authority, but having done so was concerned about workers' response to Bawadi's suspension. He instructed a yard labourer to bring goods from the warehouse for the rest of the day, in the hope that this would take the heat out of the situation. He then went home for lunch. The pleasantness of the meal was interrupted by his two deputy managers, who in-

formed him that all work in the pawnshop had stopped. He rushed back to the pawnshop, only to be told by workers that they would go home if Bawadi was not reinstated immediately. The forty men then walked out, pocketing the pawnshop keys as a last defiant gesture.[28]

After leaving the Ngupasan pawnshop, the striking workers, together with the chairman of the PPPB Yogyakarta branch, went to the Assistant Resident's office to seek his intervention. The Pawnshop Inspector was summoned, but brusquely informed the strikers that if they did not go back to work immediately they would be dismissed. Undeterred, they spent the rest of the afternoon going around other pawnshops in the Yogyakarta area, informing fellow workers what had happened and seeking their support.[29]

On being informed of the dispute, the Head of the Pawnshop Service in Batavia adopted a more conciliatory approach, instructing his Yogyakarta inspector that if strikers returned the following day they were to be allowed to resume work and their grievances investigated. None, however, turned up for work on 12 January. Even after the inspector, accompanied by the Assistant Resident and the Regent of Yogyakarta, warned a meeting of strikers of the dire consequences of their action, they still refused to resume work. That same day sympathy strikes broke out at two other pawnshops in Yogyakarta city and at four more in the surrounding region. By the evening of 12 January, 100 workers were on strike.[30]

The strike caught both pawnshop management and PPPB central leaders unawares. The union chairman, Haji Agus Salim, was immediately informed of the events at Ngupasan by Abdul Muis, but advised that the conflict should be localized to Yogyakarta.[31] Publicly, of course, the PPPB central executive was forced to support the strikers, pointing to its long-standing criticism of regulations which required officers to bring goods from warehouses to display areas: 'Truly, this regulation is humiliating, because officers have to take away rice steamers, urinals, pitchers and other things in full view of the public'.[32]

In discussions with the Head of the Pawnshop Service on 12 and 13 January, however, Abdul Muis and other Yogyakarta leaders were more concerned to prevent the strike from spreading by persuading management to compromise with the strikers. Abdul Muis urged that he be given time to persuade the strikers to return

to work and that until then all dismissals be withdrawn. The Head of the Pawnshop Service travelled to Yogyakarta from Batavia on 14 January to investigate the dispute firsthand, closely followed by Salim. The two met on the evening of 15 January, and again Salim explained that the PPPB central executive hoped to localize the strike in order to negotiate the re-employment of dismissed strikers.[33]

While Salim was endeavouring to restrain pawnshop workers, the Pawnshop Service management was in no mood for compromise, confident that the strike would be confined to Yogyakarta Residency and that it could find replacement labour with ease.[34] Nittel blamed the strike on the chairman of the Yogyakarta branch of the PPPB, Tedjomartojo, who, he argued, supported the strike and had made no effort to persuade workers to return to work. As far as he was concerned there was no room for negotiation and compromise.[35]

The moderating efforts of PPPB leaders was clear at a mass meeting in Yogyakarta on 16 January. Two union and political leaders of such strongly divergent ideologies as Sarekat Islam leader Abdul Muis and PKI leader Tan Malaka took a conciliatory line. Abdul Muis urged strikers to return to work, while Tan Malaka argued that the strike should not spread further and that, until a solution was found, if workers were ordered by Inspectors to carry goods from the warehouse they should obey the orders. Not everyone was in agreement. Suardi Surjaningrat argued that now the strike had begun it must continue and that everyone must support the strikers, explaining that he had given free lodgings to three of them. Other speakers, including Sutopo from Budi Utomo, promised financial as well as moral support until strikers' grievances were redressed.[36]

Despite the efforts of Abdul Muis and Salim, the strike spread quickly from the Yogyakarta region to pawnshops throughout central and east Java, reflecting the grass-roots discontent which had been simmering in the pawnshops for many years. On 15 January, for example, the Surabaya branch of the PPPB decided that workers in Surabaya pawnshops would join the strike if there was no wage increase and if dismissed strikers in Yogyakarta were not re-employed. Strikes broke out there on 17 January.[37] At Tegal, on the north coast of central Java, when the chairman of a public meeting organized by the local PPPB branch proposed that workers stay on the job, giving financial support only to Yogya-

karta strikers, loud and insistent calls came from the floor that 'the chairman is weak, we must strike'. By 21 January, there were forty-one pawnshop workers in Tegal and seventy-eight in nearby Pekalongan on strike.[38] A circular was reportedly spread, signed Kaum Pemogok and printed in red letters, stating that anyone who did not support the strike was a traitor against his own people.[39] A representative of the Kebumen branch of Sarekat Islam put the issue in equally stark terms in a speech to a public meeting in Semarang on 12 Feburary: 'Muslims who do not want to support this movement are not genuine Muslims'.[40]

The frustration of PPPB leaders at their failure to move either management or government to compromise was evident at a public meeting in Batavia on 22 January. Some 400 people heard Sjahbuddin Latif, representing the PPPB central executive, explain how the union had tried repeatedly to resolve the conflict peacefully but had received no response from management. They were urged to support those who had become victims of the strike.[41]

The European community, predictably, took a hard line against the strikers. An editorial in the *Java Bode* was more blunt than most when it said simply that 'We, Europeans, are still always the boss here . . .'[42] Political and union leaders responded angrily to such blatant flaunting of European power and the article, widely reported in the Indonesian press, only increased support for the strikers. The *Pandhuisbond*, the union of European pawnshop workers, editorialized that it had been warning the government for years about its failure to support European managers. It dismissed the PPPB leadership as disreputable outsiders, but saw a much deeper cause behind the strike:

> . . . the present strike springs from the weak attitude of the administration of van Limburg Stirum, who offered the leaders of the Native Unions a finger, with the inevitable consequence that under his successor they have tried to seize the whole hand.[43]

In this it was echoing the views of a growing section of the European community which, since the emergence of Sarekat Islam, had become increasingly uneasy at what it saw as the government's liberal attitude towards Indonesian organizations.

By the beginning of February the strike was Java-wide. Abdul Muis seems to have abandoned his attempts to contain the strike

by 1 January, when he went on a speaking tour urging other pawnshop workers to join their Yogyakarta colleagues. Within two days of his addressing a PPPB public meeting in Batavia, up to a third of the workforce in the city's pawnshops went on strike.[44] At the peak of the strike, on 17 February, some 1,181 workers throughout Java were involved, out of a total Indonesian workforce in the pawnshops of 5,180.[45]

Strike support committees sprang up in the major towns on the initiative of local union or political leaders. By the middle of February the Yogyakarta committee, for example, had raised f1,030, and by the beginning of April f3,614.[46] It had also established a temporary shelter in the yard of the Sarekat Islam branch office where strikers could eat and drink for no charge, could also sleep if necessary, and where new and used domestic items donated by well-wishers were sold for the strikers' benefit. Sarekat Islam offices in other towns were used as support centres, collecting money or food for strikers. Impressive though this support was, it provided only minimum sustenance for strikers and their families. Indeed, many strikers sent their wives and children to parents and relatives in their villages of origin in order to make strike funds last as long as possible.[47]

Regular public meetings were held, with one in Yogyakarta on 28 January attracting 1,500 people — it coincided with a welcome to Surjopranoto who had just been released from fourteen days' jail at Malang for a speaking offence. Suardi Surjaningrat delivered a long and sharp speech in which he argued, as he had for some time, that as long as the Javanese people worked for the colonial government they would never be free.

> So long as people work as servants of the capitalists we cannot speak of an inner freedom of the people.
> . . . God will give every person enough to eat if he only works. It is better to print cloth and sell *sarong* than to be the slave of capitalism.[48]

Almost all Indonesian political and union organizations publicly supported the striking pawnshop workers. A number of Chinese organizations in Surabaya also met early in February to solicit support for strikers from the Chinese community, a rare show of solidarity from leaders of Chinese workers who were increasingly concerned at the ease with which Chinese had in the past been used as strike breakers. Even the generally conservative Budi

Utomo publicly supported the strikers. For some time there had been serious debate within Budi Utomo as to whether or not it should be more deeply involved in political acitivity. Its vice-chairman in 1922, an agricultural school teacher named Sutopo, strongly supported the pawnshop workers.[49] Indeed, at a PPPB protest meeting in Yogyakarta on 15 January, he had rather ostentatiously donated his watch and all the money in his pocket to the strikers' support fund.[50] The Budi Utomo central executive was more cautious, deciding late in January to give financial support to strikers and their families, but at the same time cautioning pawnshop workers that if another wild-cat strike broke out they would not give any help. If it was unhappy at an uncontrolled strike, it was also strongly critical of the attitude of the Pawnshop Service management: while accepting that they must punish strikers, it argued that they had no right to jeopardize the very livelihood of strikers' families by dismissing them. Budi Utomo, it stated, would maintain its condemnation of the government and the Pawnshop Service as long as strikers were refused re-employment.[51] In the paternalistic language much used by Budi Utomo leaders, the Pawnshop Service management was sharply admonished because it ' . . . should behave like a father but now acts more like an enemy'.[52] The government too was condemned for not acting as a conciliator between pawnshop management and workers.[53] It denied that the strike was organized, or that it was caused by the influence of outsiders — rather it was caused by worker discontent.[54] In a circular urging Budi Utomo members to support the strikers, Suardi Surjaningrat located the strike in the mainstream of the nationalist movement:

> The struggle . . . is part of your, of our, struggle, the great and holy struggle, that since 1908, the year of the birth of our National Idea, has uplifted us all without exception.[55]

Members of the PPPB central executive had met the Pawnshop Service management a number of times since the strike began at Ngupasan on 11 January, but were unable to persuade it to make concessions in order to get strikers back on the job. Initially, it had hoped to localize the strike but, as workers at pawnshops throughout Java walked out in sympathy with the Ngupasan strikers, it was forced to take a more definite stance. On 1 February it announced that an urgent conference would be held in Yogyakarta

on 11 and 12 February, which would determine a date for a general strike.[56] A ban on holding public meetings in Yogyakarta forced branch delegates to meet in Yogyakarta on Saturday 11 February and travel together by train to Semarang, where the ban did not apply.[57] The special conference decided:

1. A general Java-wide strike would begin on 20 February if no solution was found to the strike by then.
2. All members who did not leave work on that day would be dismissed from the union.
3. Branches outside Java and Madura should pay increased contributions to the union in order to support the strikers.
4. All trade unions in the two federations, the PPKB and the Revolutionary Federation of Trade Unions, were urged to protest to the government against the Pawnshop Service management's attitude to the strike and call for a speedy resolution.
5. Union members were to remain in contact with branch executives during the strike.[58]

The general strike was a failure. On 20 February few pawnshop workers joined those already on strike. Salim quickly admitted the failure of the general strike call, attributing it to workers being frightened by government intimidation.[59] He was probably right. Certainly, the government marshalled the full weight of its regional administrations behind the Pawnshop Service. A few days before the general strike was due to begin, for example, the Regent of Bandung issued a bulletin to all pawnshop workers in his Regency, advising them to have nothing to do with the PPPB because it would only bring misery on them.[60] Elsewhere, the Regent of Lamongan sent a circular to all village heads, village school teachers and *priyayi* in his Regency cautioning them against donating money for support of the strikers.[61] Managers of pawnshops where workers went on strike recalled all workers from leave, offered immediate jobs to men who had left the service but expressed a wish to rejoin, and drew on the local civil service for temporary replacements. The service also moved back to central Java those workers who had been sent to west Java in recent months because of the temporary oversupply of labour. No doubt these men were glad to go home. Around 600 successful candidates at the entrance exams who had been waiting for vacancies were immediately employed and provision was made to administer

the entrance exam to those who had completed the final stage of the Native Second Class School.[62] As a show of strength, the major pawnshops were patrolled by armed police and those willing to work protected by local police.[63]

The strike was defeated, with strikers refused re-employment not only in the Pawnshop Service but also in any government department. The PPPB too was destroyed, with membership dropping from pre-strike figures of more than half of the just over 5,000 Indonesian workers to only 1,200 members at the end of July.[64] A *Comite Pembangun Persatuan* (Committee to Develop Unity), established by the special conference in February, took on the task of breathing new life into the demoralized union, where branches had died because leaders had been dismissed, and where the central executive was desperately short of money. One of the key members of this committee was Surjopranoto, who at the same time was trying to revive the shattered sugar factory workers' union, the PFB. At the beginning of August, the *Comite Pembangun Persatuan* and the PPPB central executive announced that a special PPPB congress would be held on 21-23 August to discuss the revival of the union.[65] This was premature, for the union had neither the funds nor the organization to hold a congress. Although the union journal, *Soeara Boemipoetra*, was revived in March 1923, it was not until April that year that a congress could be held.[66]

In a speech in the Volksraad in September 1922, Haji Agus Salim admitted that many mistakes had been made by the labour movement in general and the Pawnshop Workers Union in particular. However, he reminded critics of the enormous good the PPPB had done for the status and conditions of pawnshop workers. When it was formed in 1916 the treatment of native officers was degrading and discriminatory:

> It is not so long ago, in 1917 or 1918 to be precise, that the Pawnshop Service management had mats spread on the floor of the offices of departmental heads, because the native officer, if he had business with his Head, had to sit bolt upright on the floor in front of him and remain in this position throughout his stay. There was also a separate toilet for natives near the office and a sharp watch was kept to ensure that they did not enter the convenience 'for gentlemen'.[67]

The crushing defeat of the PPPB forced it to re-assess its policies, which had hitherto assumed that the government would

remain neutral in any dispute with the Pawnshop Service and might even be persuaded to act as conciliator. Indeed, until the January strike the PPPB experience had been that the government had listened to its protests and where local strikes had occurred had intervened to attend to workers' grievances. As Surjopranoto argued in June, ' . . .one now has to accept a defensive position and must seek cooperation with employers'.[68]

RAILWAY WORKERS AND THE RECESSION

THE VSTP was the largest and best organized labour union in the Indies and had obtained significant gains for railway and tramway workers. These hard-won gains were threatened by the sudden recession in the Indies economy and the massive cuts in most areas of government expenditure. The railways were a barometer of the economic health of the colony. When the economy boomed, as it did for a few years after 1918, so did freight and passenger loads as well as profits. But when the economy faltered, from mid-1921 through to 1923 in conjuction with the world-wide recession, there were less of the highly profitable export crops to move and passenger levels also dropped away. Concerned at falling loads and declining profits, in the middle of 1922 the private railway companies announced that they would phase out the cost-of-living allowances in three equal instalments, on 1 June 1922, 1 January and 1 March 1923.[69] The government announced at the same time that the cost-of-living allowance for all government employees would be removed on 1 January 1923.[70]

These economies were bad enough, but they were quickly followed by a series of other cost-cutting measures. In October 1922 the NIS, for example, introduced a cash inducement for its workers to resign and announced that annual wage increments due the following January would be halved. On 28 December it raised rentals for company-owned houses from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of wages and stopped paying housing allowances in lieu of access to company-owned houses. On 29 December starting wages and promotion increments were lowered and on 1 January 1923 the clothing regulations were changed so that the company would only provide the initial set of clothes and the workers would have to repair and replace these at their own expense. On 26 April all automatic wage increments were frozen and on 1 May overtime allowances were changed to the disadvantage of workers.[71] Similar

measures were introduced by the other private railway companies and by the State Railways. In December 1922 they began to dismiss a few workers whom they declared redundant, which raised fears that widespread redundancies would soon be declared.[72]

The impact of these measures on the Indonesian workforce was considerable. Aside from the worsening conditions of employment, reduced promotion opportunities and loss of important fringe benefits such as housing allowances, actual weekly cash incomes were noticeably lower. Among the better paid skilled workers, such as engine drivers, conductors and station masters, with their rising expectations and patterns of consumption, as well as among the lower paid majority who lived on the margins of existence, the suddenness of the cash cuts aroused the greatest discontent.

Workers in the State Railways were much more immediately affected than those in the private railway companies. The government-appointed inquiry into the causes of the May 1923 strike calculated that when the cost-of-living allowance was halved in the State Railways on 1 January 1923, the wages of lower paid workers earning f20 or less per month — the great majority of Indonesian workers — dropped by a massive 21 per cent. Equivalent groups in the private railways suffered no more than a 13.5 per cent drop in wages and in most cases considerably less.[73] The discrepancy was caused by the way in which the private companies and the State Railways withdrew the cost-of-living allowances. The private companies ended the cost-of-living allowance, but as a temporary measure introduced personal allowances for all permanent employees. The personal allowances would be reduced proportionately as workers gained annual wage increments or promotion. By these measures, existing employees were cushioned against the loss of the cost-of-living allowance, though any new workers were employed at base rates. In the State Railways, however, where basic rates were in any case quite a bit lower than in the private companies, the cost-of-living allowance made up 60 per cent of total wages for those earning less than f50 per month. The sudden halving of this, with its foreshadowed abolition on 1 June 1923, had a devastating effect on workers' cash resources.[74]

It is difficult to compare with any accuracy wages and conditions in the three major railway networks, the NIS, the Sister Societies and the State Railways, because of the different ways

total wages were calculated. Most workers received a basic rate according to their job, usually on an incremental scale, supplemented by kilometer money (based on distances travelled by train crews), diligence money (based on regular attendance at work) and overtime payments. However, all reports, including two government-appointed inquiries in 1922 and 1923, agreed that conditions were best in the NIS and worst, by a considerable margin, in the State Railways. An inquiry into labour conditions in the Semarang-Cirebon Railway Company, a member of the Sister Societies, reported in December 1922 that conditions there compared most favourably with those in the State Railways.[75] It is significant that the 1923 strike was considerably more extensive and long-lasting in the State Railways than in the Sister Societies and received only minimal support in the NIS.

After the onset of the recession, central leaders of the VSTP were under even greater pressure from branch executives and ordinary members to take industrial action in defence of workers' living standards. In response to the growing pressure from below, and with an eye to retaining credibility, in June 1922 they began a campaign against the economy measures and the foreshadowed cuts in wages and conditions in the railway industry. Semaun had returned to the Indies from a seven month visit to the Soviet Union in late May, exhilarated by the experience yet even more aware than before of the effects of the world recession on Indonesian workers. He immediately took over again as VSTP chairman and began to rebuild the union, which had lost over half of its membership since his departure overseas in October 1921.[76]

Semaun's strategy was to organize and channel railway workers' grievances through public meetings and union propaganda, designed in part to prepare them for stronger action if necessary and in part to convince railway managements of the depth of the discontent. He hoped to persuade the government to change its economic policies or at least maintain neutrality in the VSTP's dispute with railway managements by convincing it that the issues were industrial ones. It was essential for the success of this strategy that VSTP central leaders retain careful control over local hotheads and constantly stress at public meetings their intention to use only peaceful and legal means to achieve their ends. He repeatedly argued at union meetings that strike action should be avoided if at all possible, because its impact on workers would be heavy and its result not at all certain.[77]

Meetings were held in towns and cities throughout Java in the latter half of 1922, protesting at the economy measures and mobilizing workers to join the VSTP as their only way of defending living standards. Memorials were dispatched to the Governor-General, the Volksraad and the Lower House of the Netherlands Parliament, and support was sought from unions in the Netherlands.

VSTP leaders had further discussions with the managements of the three major railway networks in an effort to make them aware of the groundswell of discontent among their Indonesian workforce. Their letter to the directors of the Semarang-Joana Steamtram Society was typical of those sent to all companies. They protested that the abolition by the SJS of cost-of-living allowances would save the company only f50,000 in 1922 and argued that to cut the purchasing power of workers even further would only deepen the malaise, further reducing company profits. They urged the directors to consider the people affected by their decisions:

> There are in the Indies, the land of wealth, thousands of unemployed natives. Because of the absence of government measures, these unemployed people would be left to their own fate if it were not for a centuries old tradition of family support. Their relatives, on whose labour they now live, are themselves mostly simple workers. Whereas before the world crisis the lives of these workers were already hard, even more are they now, when as well as their own families they also have to support their unemployed relatives.[78]

The revived VSTP activity was reflected in a considerable growth in its membership, from a low point of around 8,000 in June 1922, to approximately 11,000 at the beginning of March 1923 and around 13,000 by the beginning of May.[79] At meetings throughout Java, Semaun, Kadarisman, Sudibio and others stressed the need for workers to unite behind the union in order to fight the economies.[80] Kadarisman took the battle to Sumatra when, from late November 1922 until early January 1923, he made a propaganda tour, speaking at public meetings and encouraging local branches to expand their membership and extend their consciousness-raising programmes.[81] Reports on branch meetings make it clear that the economy measures and the consequent drop in wages were the major topics agitating ordinary members. Motions were passed condemning the cuts and proposals formulated

for discussion at the next congress, demanding industrial action in order to improve working conditions in the industry. The call to strike, which had been heard in most VSTP branches and in the columns of *Volharding* and *Si Tetap* over the past two years, became by the end of 1922 a resounding demand for action.

All this activity failed to move either the government or railway managements. In November the VSTP central executive decided to bring the matter closer to a head by calling a congress for Semarang on 3 and 4 February 1923. The 'Great Congress', as it was labelled in advertising handbills distributed in Semarang late in January, took place in an atmosphere of tension and drama.[82] For the duration of the two day congress the government placed armed police and military guards on all stations and organized police and military patrols of major railway lines throughout Java, ostensibly because it feared some sort of disturbance or sabotage. In reality it was a calculated show of strength.[83] Against this background of intimidation, Semaun delivered the keynote address on the evening of 3 February to a public meeting attended by over 3,000 people. He spoke long and eloquently in an endeavour at one and the same time to arouse his listeners' active support and to impress upon them the importance of cool heads and careful action. After lamenting that the workers had 'gone back to sleep' after the gains of 1920, he rejoiced that they had been aroused from their slumber by the recession, once again realizing that their livelihood could only be safeguarded by active union membership. He cautioned, though, as he had many times before, that the VSTP intended to defend their interests through 'proper' and legal means only.[84]

The crucial decisions of the congress were taken at a closed meeting of branch representatives held in the VSTP offices on the morning of 4 February, with 100 representatives from seventy-nine branches in attendance. In accepting the overwhelming vote in favour of a strike as clear evidence that railway and tramway workers' patience was exhausted, Semaun again warned delegates against actions such as had happened at earlier strikes in the Malang and Probolinggo tram companies when, after the strikes had failed, a number of trams were deliberately derailed.[85] He concluded by expressing the hope that the authorities would take notice of the views of railway workers. If they did not, he asserted, the VSTP executive would not be responsible for the consequences.

Although the congress had decided to strike if negotiations with railway managements were fruitless, VSTP central leaders continued to try to persuade the companies to make some concessions in order to ward off pressures from below for a strike. They were still reluctant to launch into a strike, which they knew would bring hardship to many workers and the outcome of which was far from certain, if they could possibly achieve their goals through threats and negotiations. Branch meetings in February and March were addressed by central executive members, especially by Semaun, Kadarisman, Sugono, Sudibio and Najoan, and the public campaign was kept up to maximize the pressure on the railway managements. The Salaries Commission, which had been established by the government to recommend improvements in the wages of government employees, was addressed on 19 February by Semaun and Najoan, who again urged increased wages for the lowest paid workers in the railways. They were clearly disappointed by the Salaries Commission's decision on 24 February to give lower paid workers in the railways an increase of between 5 and 10 per cent only.[86]

At the beginning of April the VSTP executive again arranged meetings with the managements of the three major railway networks. Little was achieved beyond vague promises to keep the Indonesian workers' plight in mind if further cuts were necessary. The VSTP's three major demands — the reversal of all economy measures, including restoration of cost-of-living allowances, establishment of an 8 hour working day and creation of an arbitration board for the railway industry — were rejected. Semaun concluded the meeting with the Chief Inspector of the State Railways by warning:

> Now we will let the workers themselves speak. We have tried to go through the right channels but the workers' lot is becoming increasingly bad and it goes without saying that this will find its own outlet.[87]

It was increasingly clear to VSTP leaders that railway managements were not prepared to make any concessions and were, indeed, preparing to ride out any strike. But still they hesitated to set a definite date for a general strike. It loomed closer on 23 April, however, when Semaun sent a signed circular to all branches for distribution to members, calling on them to be prepared for a strike at any time. In this circular Semaun recounted the deteriorating

conditions in the railways and tramways and the decision of the February congress to take direct action if negotiations with managements did not bring about improvements. The executive had met the managements of all networks but had received no satisfaction. He then announced the itineraries of the VSTP propagandists, Sudibio, Sutikno, Sanusi and himself, who would visit all branches between 8 and 25 May to explain the current situation. Branches were urged to organize meetings and ensure that as many workers as possible attended. The circular concluded with a statement by Kadarisman that, if the strike broke out, Semaun would immediately assume complete powers over the union until it was concluded. Finally, he reported that on 19 April the Resident of Semarang had threatened Semaun with externment, but to no effect: 'Jail or externment is not so bad, because the life of the poor workers is like life in a jail or in exile'.[88]

The Resident of Semarang's warning to Semaun seems to have finally convinced VSTP leaders that further negotiations with railway managements would achieve nothing. Further, it probably also made them realize that the government would not remain neutral much longer, thereby drastically changing the balance of power in the dispute with railway managements. These twin realizations were probably the reason for Semaun foregoing his normally cautious approach on 30 April, when he stated at a public meeting of the PVH that, if he or any other VSTP leader was arrested, the railway strike would break out immediately.[89] He repeated the threat at a large public meeting organized by the VSTP at Semarang on 6 May, when over 3,000 people heard him recount the abject failure of negotiations and state that there was no other way to achieve their goals than by a general strike. The date of the strike had yet to be determined, but, if he was arrested, then it must begin the following morning — a call which brought thunderous applause from his audience and loud calls of 'strike', 'strike', 'good', 'good' and 'splendid'.[90]

VSTP plans called for a large public meeting in Semarang on 5 June at the conclusion of the propagandists' tour of branches in Java, when the timing of the general strike would be further discussed.[91] To be most effective the strike would have to be held after the sugar milling season got into full swing in July, when the railways would be operating at full capacity and when shipping schedules, contract dates and the lack of storage space at the inland sugar factories would maximize the chance of forcing con-

cessions from railway managements. Given these plans, it was extremely risky for Semaun to challenge the government openly on 30 April and 6 May. Although, in retrospect, it appears to have been a major political error and a strategic blunder, as Ruth McVey has argued,[92] it was a calculated action rather than simply a result of Semaun losing his temper after the Resident of Semarang's warning twelve days earlier. He may have thought that he could ward off impending government intervention a little longer by raising its cost. He may also have reasoned that his own arrest could easily be followed by the arrest of other VSTP leaders, thereby decapitating the union before the pressure of a strike could be brought to bear. In these circumstances an immediate strike after the first arrest might be the only way to prevent the destruction of the union.

Semaun's concern about the outcome of a strike was not shared by local leaders, who not only enthusiastically favoured strike action but also believed that it would quickly bring the railways to a standstill. Repeatedly, at branch meetings in February and March, local leaders argued along the lines of the Tanahabang (Batavia) representative to the February congress, who saw a strike as necessary because 'one must teach the managers a lesson'.[93] The chairman of a VSTP meeting at Pungkurweg (Bandung) on 9 March urged members to hold firm to their decision to strike if their demands were not met:

> Remember that the will to strike must come from the heart and not be stirred up by others. We must teach the State Railways management a lesson by striking. But the strike must be general and not merely a local one. The way to oppose the economy measures is to strike. Remember that we live in a time of economizing and that we must not allow this to continue. Fear not, if we strike our friends will help us.[94]

Even Sudibio, a propagandist and member of the daily executive, argued that the railway industry could not hold out longer than a week if a strike occurred.[95] Many leaders, both local and central, believed significant support would be given them by other unions and there would be sympathy strikes among postal, telephone, pawnshop and printing workers.[96] On the trains and the trams, in the stations and railway workshops, a sense of impatient expectation was building up as talk of a strike became commonplace.

The Resident of Semarang's warning to Semaun was the first public sign that the government was contemplating action against him. A month earlier, for the third time in two years, Governor-General Fock and the Council of the Netherlands Indies had discussed the possible internment of both Semaun and Darsono, another prominent PKI leader, in response to a proposal by the colony's Attorney-General, Wolterbeck Muller.[97] Fock had then decided to wait before finally deciding on the Attorney-General's request. Clearly he was uncertain as to whether to precipitate a strike by ordering the arrests or to wait in the hope that the moderating influence of Semaun would be successful within the VSTP.

The Attorney-General continued to press his case throughout March, forwarding more police reports purporting to show the subversive activities of the two communists.[98] On 16 April, Fock informed the Resident of Semarang of his decision against interning Semaun and Darsono for the time being, and instructed that, instead, he issue a strong warning to both men and keep them under closer surveillance. Fock wanted the warning issued immediately because the question of a strike would be discussed at the VSTP Congress due to be held on 30 April. If stronger evidence emerged, then he might move to intern the two men.[99]

The Resident of Semarang, J. van Gigch, summoned Semaun and Darsono on 18 April and instructed them to moderate their activities or face internment. Neither was cowed by this warning, and Semaun spiritedly responded that, as he had no idea why he was being warned, there was no way in which he could guarantee to satisfy the government's wishes. Van Gigch replied that he too could guarantee nothing. Darsono was no less repentant, asserting that 'I only do what I consider my duty to myself and the people', to which the far-from-amused Resident responded that the government also only did what it considered its duty.[100]

The Resident's report might have been accepted without particular comment in Batavia, except that he sent with it a translation of a speech Semaun supposedly gave at a meeting of the Federation of Native Employees of Regional and Municipal Councils (*Perserikatan Kaum Buruh Locale Ressorten Hindia*) on 1 April. Part of the account of Semaun's speech stated:

Our attitude, said the speaker, if a revolution does break out — I said if, not, come, let us make a rebellion tomorrow — is that we must urge our

trade union not to kill any white people, but merely put them in jail, as hostages, so that the white people cannot use bombs against us. This way, we will ensure there is no destruction and no killing, but imprisonment only, with an undertaking to send them all home. Further, 100 white people can be exchanged for 100 rifles, 10,000 white people for a warship. In this way there will be no bloodshed and we will be able to be free.[101]

It is impossible to determine the accuracy of this report on Semaun's speech, as no source was given and it was not included in contemporary newspaper reports of the meeting. It presumably originated from a police agent present at the meeting. The accuracy of such reports had frequently in the past been questioned by Residents, Attorneys-General and Governors-General alike. If Semaun did, in fact, say what he was reported to have said, it was certainly out of character for a man who, since his entry into the labour movement and nationalist politics in 1914, had been remarkably moderate in his public speeches and actions. Accurate or not, it was interpreted by the government as an incitement to violence and provided the public justification that Governor-General Fock needed to take the action he had rejected just over a month earlier. On 8 May Semaun was arrested.

Fock knew only too well that the arrest of Semaun would be the catalyst for a railway strike. In reporting to the Minister of Colonies, he cited as the three major considerations behind his action: the report of Semaun's 1 April speech; Semaun's cavalier response to the warning from the Resident of Semarang; and the VSTP's manifesto of 23 April which stated that a strike could break out any time.[102] He also cited Semaun's defiant challenge on 30 April at a PVH meeting in Surabaya, which was repeated on 6 May at a VSTP meeting in Semarang, that, if he or any other VSTP leader was arrested, then the strike would break out immediately. No one of these factors was decisive but, collectively, they were more than enough to convince him that he had waited long enough. He may also have reasoned that, as he would have to take action sometime, it was better to do so before 8 May, when the VSTP leaders began their propaganda tour. Fock had only become aware of the proposed tour on 1 May, when the Resident of Semarang sent him a copy of the VSTP manifesto of 23 April. This could have convinced him that it was better to precipitate a strike immediately, before the VSTP was fully prepared, so that it could be smashed well before the peak of the sugar-milling season when

the railways were vital for the transport of sugar from the sugar factories to the ports.

Precipitating the strike had a further important advantage to the colonial government. It could now argue that the strike was directed against the government itself, rather than against the railway companies, thereby becoming a political action deliberately challenging law and order in the colony. If the strike had broken out in July or August the government would have had greater difficulty in ignoring its essential economic causes. At that time there was no legal prohibition against strikes in the colony and the government's oft-repeated position was that it did not necessarily oppose all industrial action taken to improve the conditions of workers. By striking immediately upon Semaun's arrest, the VSTP allowed the government to justify the repressive measures it adopted to break both the strike and the union. The Council of the Netherlands Indies, in later recommending the internment of Semaun and Darsono, summed up the attitudes of both the government and most of the European community when it argued:

> A strike occuring as a reaction to the application of the general legal code undoubtedly has a revolutionary character. All leading figures in the VSTP are in equal measure guilty. None of them have spoken against the calling of a strike as a consequence of the arrest of Semaun.[103]

The afternoon of 8 May must have been hectic in the Semarang headquarters of the VSTP, as union leaders planned their response to the government's action. They were joined during the afternoon by local PKI and Sarekat Islam leaders and by leaders of other unions in the city. Telephone calls were made to the Pawnshop Workers' Union headquarters in Yogyakarta and to Suroso, the chairman of the Indies Trade Union Federation (PVH) in Mojokerto, seeking support. A decision was quickly reached to hold a meeting that evening: willing helpers went into the workplaces and kampungs to spread handbills urging all railway and tramway workers to attend. Executive members caught the first available trains out of Semarang to take to other towns circulars reminding members of the decision to strike the moment Semaun was arrested.[104]

The afternoon edition of *Sinar Hindia* carried a front-page report of Semaun's arrest which, to gain added sympathy, was

cleverly juxtaposed with news of the birth of his son barely half an hour earlier. Not that this was needed, for the mood of railway workers had been evident for some months. After calling on all railway and tramway workers to strike, the editorial stated its belief that the strike would be greeted with joy by all workers and would be a significant page in the history of the Indies. It concluded by printing a series of exhortations urging preparedness, determination and caution:

'When you strike it is not necessary for you to take up arms. Sleep only, and the employers stomachs will become flatter.'
'Hey proletarians! Join the ranks quickly. Away with the perfidious capitalists.'
'Listen to no sweet words from the other side; it is all poison. Trust only your own power.'[105]

So many people attended the meeting that evening that the venue had to be moved from the VSTP offices to the much larger Sarekat Islam building across the road. The assistant police commissioner in Semarang was present, supported by a detachment of armed police lined up outside, rifles at the ready, in case of disturbances.[106] Undeterred, the meeting unanimously decided to strike the following day and not to return to work until Semaun was released. Moreover, it called on the private railway companies and the State Railways to meet the demands adopted by the VSTP congress on 3 February: restoration of cost-of-living allowances; the establishment of an arbitration board; and the introduction of an 8 hour day. By general acclaim, Sugono was appointed 'strike dictator', in place of the arrested Semaun, and head of the 'Central Leadership of the Rail and Tram Strike in the Netherlands Indies'.[107]

On the morning of 9 May only one Indonesian worker, a ticket seller, turned up for work at the Semarang SCS station at the normal starting time of 5:30 a.m. At the SJS station a few station workers reported for work, but no engine drivers, firemen or shunters. In contrast, most workers at the NIS turned up as usual, though the following day many joined the strike.[108] A few early morning passenger trains into or out of Semarang were cancelled, as were many goods trains that day, but most passenger services were maintained, albeit sometimes behind schedule. The companies coped by swinging into effect well-laid contingency

plans. European supervisors and office workers were detailed to man the ticket counters, act as conductors and engine drivers, and even to take on the arduous work of stokers. The Semarang city tram service operated by the SJS was maintained, not only by European staff labour but also by Indonesian students from the local technical school, who were released from school to work as stokers, bellmen and conductors, jobs which they doubtless found far more exciting than the normal daily lessons.[109]

The VSTP central executive's manifesto reached Surabaya sometime late on the afternoon of 8 May, presumably carried by a courier on the afternoon train from Semarang. It was not until the following day that it was widely distributed, and news of Semaun's arrest filtered into the workplaces and stations. The lateness of its receipt prevented the Surabaya branch organizing a public meeting until the evening of 9 May, but as Surabaya had been one of the branches calling loudest for a strike, its decision was a foregone conclusion. On the morning of 10 May, an estimated 90 per cent of the Indonesian workforce failed to turn up for work at the Surabaya stations of the State Railways.[110] A local reporter described the chaos at the city station which since 7 a.m. had been crowded not only with people wanting to travel but also with those curious to find out what was going on. The station was ringed by local town police and by troops, who barred all non-travelling Indonesians from entering, whether or not they held valid platform tickets. The other Surabaya station, at Gubeng, was also crowded, as trains were delayed or cancelled. As each train pulled out of the Gubeng station, soldiers stood nearby, rifles at the ready, in case any strikers attempted to prevent its departure.[111]

By 9 May the strike in the Sister Societies' network had spread from Semarang to Pekalongan, where only five people turned up for work at the SCS station. By 10 May it had extended to Tegal and Cirebon, as strike leaders went along the lines persuading workers to stop work, and on 12 May workers at the SCS workshops in Semarang also joined the strike. The day before, eleven of the workshop workers had signed a letter on behalf of themselves and their colleagues directed to the Head of Operations of the SCS at Semarang, threatening strike action if three specific demands were not immediately agreed to:

1. Wages to be restored to their level before 1 April when they were reduced by between 1 and 2 cents per hour.

2. Holiday allowances to be reintroduced.
3. Annual increases in wages to be introduced.

The eleven who signed the letter were some of the oldest and most skilled workers in the workshops and for this reason the Head of Operations summoned them to find out why they had made these demands. The men answered that the cost of house rents, food and education for their children was so high that they could not live on the reduced wages. Their demands were rejected and they were warned that, if they went on strike, the SCS would immediately dismiss them and when the strike was over would not re-employ as many as it now did. When pressed, the eleven signatories are reported to have said that, although they personally did not want to strike, they were under considerable pressure from younger people in the workshop, especially from those who only earned between 10 and 12 cents an hour. Unmoved, the Head of Operations told them that those who wanted to continue working would be given police protection.[112]

At its peak on 13 May, around 10,000 workers were on strike out of a total Indonesian workforce in all the railway and tramway companies in Java of about 50,000. The strike was concentrated in the State Railways, with 8,285 strikers out of a total Indonesian workforce of about 26,000. These strikers were almost entirely confined to the central and east Java lines, with only a handful from west Java participating. Around 5,000 of the strikers were employed in Surabaya Residency, 1,700 in Madiun, over 600 in Kediri (all in east Java), and more than 700 in Yogyakarta, central Java.[113] The strike was almost total in Surabaya city, with about 90 per cent of the Indonesian workforce of approximately 1,200 failing to show up for work on 10 May, the first day of the strike.[114] In Kediri, over 60 per cent of the Indonesian workforce joined the strike.[115] In Madiun, the 1,700 strikers, almost the entire workforce in the railway workshops and stations, were evenly distributed among skilled and unskilled workers. On 11 May, 273 out of 314 tradesmen were on strike, 123 out of 134 apprentices, 28 out of 30 drivers, all 333 firemen, 1,073 out of 1,221 workers in the workshops, 5 out of 8 warehouse keepers and 188 out of 202 day labourers.[116]

The strike in the State Railways was concentrated in east and central Java, largely because the VSTP was better organized in those regions and had since 1915 been able to focus workers'

grievances there, while it had never succeeded in attracting more than a small proportion of railway workers in west Java. Moreover, despite the fact that State Railways wages and conditions were reasonably uniform throughout Java, though generally higher in the cities than at rural stations, workers came into contact with their higher paid counterparts in the private companies only in east and central Java. With the State Railways in a monopoly position in west Java, the workers were less likely to be aware of wage differentials between the State and private railways. Ordinary workers, then, were considerably more militant on the east and central Java lines.

Many fewer workers went on strike in the two major private companies. In the Sister Societies more than 1,300 workers participated, but in the NIS only 325 out of a total Indonesian workforce of about 9,000 joined the strike. Most of these were Semarang-based workers and more than a third of them returned to work within the seventy-two hour deadline set by the company. While NIS operations were little affected after 9 May, the services of the Sister Societies and State Railways in central and east Java were much reduced for some weeks and the trains were very crowded, with goods services not returning to normal until sometime in June.[117]

After the strikes in the SCS in August and October 1920, the strike waves in Semarang and Surabaya that year and the strikes in the sugar industry between 1919 and 1921, the government in 1921 and 1922 had drawn up detailed plans involving cooperation between Residents, local police commissioners and army and navy commanders in the event of future strikes.[118] As the railway strike spread from Semarang, local Residents immediately put these contingency plans into effect. Armed police were sent to patrol the kampungs, especially those where strikers lived, and, in conjunction with troops and marines rushed from local barracks, guarded railway stations, public buildings, bridges, gasworks, water works and the railway lines themselves. Until July 1923, and as late as August in Surabaya, most of the major towns in Java resembled armed camps, as police, troops and marines ostentatiously patrolled streets and lanes and guarded public buildings.

If this was not enough, on 10 May a further clause was added to the battery of colonial laws designed to maintain 'tranquillity and order'. The new article, 161 *bis*, which had been prepared much earlier, banned not only incitement to strike but also support

or encouragement of strikers.[119] On 12 May temporary bans on public meetings were applied to the Residencies of Semarang, Kediri, Madiun, Pekalongan and the Priangan, and on 14 May to Surabaya as well.[120]

In December 1922, when it appeared that local discontent might force a strike, the State Railways management had warned that workers who went on strike would be breaking their contract of employment and would be dismissed. On 9 May it began to carry out this threat. At the Sister Societies, as soon as the strike broke out, the Head of Operations ordered notices to be placed in all stations and workplaces informing employees that any person absent from work longer than twenty-four hours would be dismissed. The NIS followed suit, though perhaps because it was less affected and believed that many of its workers were striking in sympathy rather than from deep-seated grievances against the company, it allowed them three days to return to work without penalty, after which they would be dismissed. On 10 May, the government's proclamation of Article 161 *bis* was posted in all stations in the Sister Societies' network as a warning to potential strikers. The new law was swiftly applied. On the morning of 11 May, for example, a station master who went on strike was arrested by the *wedana* of Adiwerna for transgressing Article 161 *bis* and Article 194 of the Penal Code.[121] To impress others of the consequences of their actions, the Head of Operations of the SCS at Tegal sent telegrams to all station masters informing them that if they left their posts, they would be in breach of articles 161 *bis* and 194. The Head of Operations commented to his superiors: 'I firmly believe that these arrests have made an impression on the workers'.[122]

If the new penal laws and the sackings were intended to intimidate workers and prevent the strike spreading, so too was the ostentatious use of armed police, troops and marines in towns and cities. Armed police and troops patrolled the railway workers' kampungs and those prepared to work were shepherded to and from work by them. In Surabaya, for example, city police worked long shifts, rural police were used to guard railway and tram lines, and troops were brought in: more than 120 troops from the Mangkunegaran Legion in Surakarta, 100 from Madura, three companies from Malang, and a small force of forty-five marines from the Surabaya naval base.[123] In Bandung, even though only a handful of railway workers joined the strike, the Resident took no

chances, organizing extra police patrols through kampungs where State Railways employees lived. Some workers were reported to be so frightened of being arrested that they slept the night at the stations rather than risk being picked up by a patrol on their way home.[124]

The government marshalled its provincial administration in the effort to prevent railway workers joining the strike. On the night of 10 May, for example, the Assistant Resident of Solo, his police commissioner, and the local *patih* and *wedana*, went from house to house informing railway workers of the new anti-strike laws and warning them of the consequences of striking. Earlier that day a group of Semarang workers, who had travelled to Solo to persuade workers there to strike, were arrested.[125] The efforts of traditional authority figures were, however, not always successful. At Sidotopo, for example, when the Regent and *patih*, together with the chief commissioner of police, met striking workers to try to persuade them to return to work, the workers refused unless Semaun was first released from jail.[126] At a VSTP meeting at Pekalongan on 9 May, the chairman of the meeting forbade the local *patih* from speaking, when he tried to persuade those present to change their minds and return to work.[127] The changes in the urban workforce's attitudes to authority meant that, by the 1920s, in the towns and cities traditional indigenous authority figures no longer possessed their earlier powers of patronage and could no longer rely on the politics of deference to maintain social control.

On 13 May the State Railways increased the pressure by ordering all strikers who lived in railway houses to vacate them within forty-eight hours, as they were no longer employed by the railways. Armed police efficiently carried out evictions in Surabaya, Semarang, Madiun, Cirebon and wherever else the State Railways rented out houses to its workers. In Surabaya, for example, where 880 State Railways houses were rented out to Indonesian workers, only eighty-one were still occupied by 18 May. All the rest had been vacated by strikers and their families or by employees who were still at work but were frightened of retaliation if they stayed in the railway kampungs.[128] Most of the occupants had left before the 15 May deadline, but 270 houses, home to an estimated 2,000 workers and their families, were forcibly emptied late in the afternoon of 15 May. The Resident of Surabaya was worried not only that the expulsions might be resisted but, even if they were carried out peaceably, that so many

homeless people would be a danger to public order in Surabaya. He set aside an old customs house for their overnight use and on 13 May, accompanied by a contingent of police, toured the State Railways kampungs urging workers to leave voluntarily.[129] His concern was unfounded, for the ejection of the 270 families took place calmly.[130] D. M. G. Koch, the editor of the east Java edition of the *Indische Courant* and generally sympathetic to the strikers' cause, graphically recalled the scene that day in one of the kampungs:

> There was in Surabaya a neighbourhood of about three hundred company houses for lower personnel of the state rail line. On the morning the strike began the people received orders to move out of those houses; police and soldiers dragged furniture and household goods from them. It was a miserable sight. Weeping women sat with their few possessions on the roadside, in a drizzling rain.[131]

The evicted families spurned the Resident's offer of the customs house, preferring to move in with friends or with families who responded to calls made by the Surabaya branches of the VSTP and Sarekat Islam.[132] This scene was repeated elsewhere, with no resistance offered by the evicted workers.

The VSTP central executive had certainly been forced to proclaim the strike before it was properly prepared. Nevertheless, given its constant difficulties of communication with branch executives and the loose structure of all unions in colonial Java, where so much initiative lay with local leaders, it is difficult to see how it could have been better prepared, even if the strike had occurred later at a date of its own choosing. As soon as the strike was announced, the executive dispatched leaders to the major branches and throughout the railway networks to enthuse and at the same time supervise local leaders. This strategy came to an abrupt halt with the proclamation of Article 161 *bis* on 10 May, when local Residents picked the leaders up one by one as they entered their territories, placing them in 'preventive detention' charged with breaking the new law. Local leaders suffered the same fate. By 15 May, twenty-two people, nearly all of them VSTP central or branch executive members, had been arrested and jailed under the new law.[133] No official figures have been found for the number of people arrested during the course of the strike under Article 161 *bis*, but contemporary accounts estimate the total at between 120

and 140, including fifty-seven VSTP leaders.[134] All of them were subsequently jailed for periods extending from a few days to a few months.

Equally important in destroying VSTP leaders' ability to direct and control the strike were the bans on the holding of public meetings, imposed on 12 and 14 May. Under these bans even closed members' meetings needed government approval, which had to be sought five days in advance. The VSTP was forbidden from holding any kind of meeting and, as the strike progressed, the restrictions were increasingly applied to other unions considered sympathetic. In addition, the Resident of Semarang isolated the VSTP headquarters from the rest of the union. Armed police guarded the office, with VSTP members again permitted to enter only two at a time.[135] In an open letter published in the PKI newspaper *Sinar Hindia* on 16 May, Sugono, the strike 'dictator', lashed out at the government's description of the strike as a political action, which it had used to justify the extreme measures taken against the strikers. He reiterated that the VSTP had tried over many months to negotiate a settlement of workers' grievances with railway managements, but to no avail, and it had used every means in its power to calm down the anger of members. Despite all this, he argued:

> The *sana* party has never understood that the leaders can do nothing if it is not the wish of their people.
> Although clever, the *sana* party has still never understood that the leaders work for their people and not for themselves.
> The *sana* party has never understood, nor will understand, that the present economy measures have led to general discontent.[136]

Not only were restrictions placed on VSTP public and private meetings, its leaders arrested and its members dismissed but, continued Sugono, the telephone at VSTP headquarters was disconnected and all union mail impounded, with the result that the central executive had completely lost contact with its branches. As the VSTP leaders no longer had control of the strike, Sugono asserted, they were absolved of responsibility for anything that now happened.

The government's unprecedented precautions were in anticipation of sabotage of trains and equipment and violence in the kampungs and town centres. Despite the emotional atmosphere,

where low paid workers had to feed themselves and their families without savings on which to fall back and where many were evicted from their homes, there was remarkably little sabotage. There were a few reported cases of points being put out of action, telegraph wires cut, an attempted fire in a timber yard, or an attempt to cut off the water supply to a workshop, but nothing of any significance. Similarly, there was little violence beyond occasional reports of stones being thrown at houses of people still at work, anonymous threatening letters sent to station masters, or threats and intimidation of those who did not strike. The strikers, of course, applied considerable pressure on their fellow workers to join them, and sometimes this was accompanied by threats. But government officials, railway managements and European newspaper editors had little basis for asserting that intimidation was the major reason the strike lasted as long as it did, thereby ignoring its social and economic causes.[137]

Only two instances of crowd unrest were reported. On the evening of 11 May, 4,000 people turned up for a VSTP meeting in the Sarekat Islam building in Surabaya. Only a small part of the crowd could fit into the meeting, with the rest having to stand outside in the street where they blocked the road. When the police tried to clear the street, they were met by much jeering and some throwing of stones and fireworks. The police then drew their batons and forcibly dispersed the crowd.[138] On another occasion, when an Indonesian policeman went into a State Railways kampung in Surabaya on 12 May to arrest a VSTP leader named Sukartono, who was charged with inciting people to strike at a meeting the previous night, about 500 people gathered around the policeman threatening that unless Sukartono was released by mid-afternoon they would march on the police headquarters and free him themselves. The situation was defused by a passing military patrol, which moved in and dispersed the crowd, enabling the policeman to carry out his arrest. The crowd's anger was probably aroused by Sukartono's innocence of the charge, a fact acknowledged by the Assistant Resident who ordered his release later that afternoon. Nevertheless, as a result of this incident the Resident of Surabaya dispatched a company of marines from the naval base to cut off and guard the State Railways kampung.[139]

Peer-group pressure, threats of violence, and, more importantly, fear of retribution after the strike was over, no doubt did play a part in persuading some workers to join the strike. But

most, like the eleven older skilled workers in the SCS workshop at Semarang already referred to, were motivated by the cuts in wages, at a time when rents, food, and clothing prices were still reflecting the high inflation since 1918. When the strike broke out in Blitar, east Java, on 11 May, the supervisor of town police went around strikers' houses asking each man why he had gone on strike. Of those at home, the engine drivers, conductors and other skilled workers for the most part replied that they were on strike because Semaun was in jail. Others said that they wanted a wage rise. Of lower level workers, such as firemen, brakesmen and pointsmen, most said that they went on strike out of solidarity with their workmates and some said that they feared retribution if they did not join the strike.[140] The Resident of Banyumas, unable to accept economic grievances as the real reason for the strike, resorted to arguing that the strike at Maos in his Residency had broken out 'because this is a locomotive depot, which has a high percentage of engine drivers and train personnel, who are amongst the most recalcitrant of the workers'.[141]

When the strike began on 8 May, the VSTP leaders had every reason to believe that they would be supported by other unions and by the nationalist movement. In this they were disappointed. Certainly, almost all union and nationalist leaders gave them moral support, despite the personal and ideological animosities existing between Semaun and other communist leaders of the VSTP and such prominent Sarekat Islam leaders as Tjokroaminoto and Surjopranoto. But in the face of the government's relentless application of laws which even prevented money being collected for strikers' families, only limited concrete support was forthcoming. There were some sympathy strikes in Semarang, but they were restricted to a one-day strike by taxi drivers on 10 May and one by meat traders in local markets for two days. Typographers in the city also struck on 14 May, partly in sympathy with the railway workers but essentially over a dispute about the payment of advance wages for the approaching Lebaran celebrations at the end of the Islamic fasting month.[142] Sporadic brief sympathy strikes were also reported from Salatiga and Bandung. Other unions called on their members to support the striking railway workers, but once the collection of money for them was prohibited there was little other unions could do.

Nevertheless, some money was raised, after the VSTP ingeniously discovered that, once the railway companies had officially

dismissed the strikers, the law prohibiting their support was no longer in effect. Support committees were set up in most of the larger railway towns, and money was raised by contribution cards being sent around the kampungs and by Sarekat Islam and the PKI making collections among their members.[143] The VSTP's own strike fund was limited: in March 1923 it held only f15,000, or less than f2 per striker.[144] On 30 May the union resorted to raising a mortgage of f10,000 on its Semarang building from an unnamed Chinese source.[145] Some additional help came from sympathetic European socialists, with D. M. G. Koch organizing collections of goods and money, and from individuals such as Tan Ping Tjiat, the wealthy administrator of the east Java edition of *Sin Po*, one of the colony's leading Malay language Chinese newspapers, who supplied rice to Surabaya strikers with payment to be made after the strike was over.[146] Another Chinese merchant at Sidotopo supplied two *kati* of rice per person per day to strikers, on the condition that they would pay for it at current prices if and when they returned to work; otherwise no payment was required.[147]

As soon as a worker joined the strike, credit from local stall-holders and shopkeepers would have dried up, as it had in previous strikes. European employers saw this as useful pressure on strikers to return to work. A high proportion of railway workers' wives probably had some income, though insufficient to maintain a family. Once a family had pawned as many domestic items as it could dispense with, then the financial pressures to return to work would have been strong. Some strikers found other jobs, on a temporary or a permanent basis, and some who were recent migrants to the city accepted sufficient money from strike support committees to return with their families to their home villages. Most, however, survived as best they could, with support from family and friends, a little income from whatever work they could find, and some assistance from support committees.

The strike had broken out just a week before Lebaran, which severely disrupted the usual journeys of many urban workers from the towns and cities back to their villages of origin. VSTP leaders called on urban workers not to spend as much as usual on Lebaran festivities, but instead to give the money saved to the victims of the government's repression.[148] One woman speaker at a public meeting on 11 May in Surabaya called on strikers to take heart because the strike had occurred in the *puasa* (fasting) month. The *puasa*, she said, was a time when the prophet Muhammad was struggling

with those who offended Islam or were evil, and to celebrate his victory a feast was held at the end of the month. The strike, she continued, was similar, in that it was a struggle between workers and capitalists: after the workers' victory, they too could have a feast in celebration, but not before the victory was won.[149]

The optimism of the early days of the strike, however, soon dissipated. Most strikers, along with many of their leaders, had expected railway managements to concede their demands very speedily. Few anticipated that the government would side with employers to the extent that it did. Brave words aside, most were in no position to last more than a few days, or a week or two at the very most.[150]

On 22 May the VSTP daily executive called off the strike. With hundreds of strikers having returned to work and thousands more dismissed and replaced by new workers, the executive was bowing to the inevitable. The bulletin announcing its decision admitted that the strike had occurred unexpectedly and that the leaders had not anticipated the government's reaction. Strikers were assured that efforts were being made to gain their re-employment, but, it was admitted, so far without success. The bulletin ended on a note not only of defeat but also of sadness:

> Finally, the daily executive reports to its brother workers that the strike would not have been launched in this way, and certainly would have been won, if the companies on the one hand and the rail and tramway workers on the other hand were free to organize their actions. We are able to accomplish nothing more because we are bound hand and foot. We may not speak, we go hungry and we no longer have any sympathy from our brothers.[151]

In the face of coordinated repression from government and railway managements, the isolated VSTP leadership could not bring the transport system to a standstill. It therefore had no bargaining power. Not only did European supervisory staff take over many of the skilled Indonesian workers' jobs, but also the tactics of managements, and their threat of immediate dismissals, quickly broke the will of many strikers. Understandably, this was too high a price to pay, and a significant number returned to work within the forty-eight or seventy-two hour deadlines laid down by the Sister Societies and the NIS respectively. In a society where thousands of people in the kampungs were eager for work at any

price, railway managements had no difficulty recruiting unskilled labour or such semi-skilled workers as pointsmen or stokers. The State Railways and the Sister Societies almost immediately advertised for people to train as conductors, and had no trouble filling the courses. Skilled workers, such as engine drivers, were harder to replace, but by using Europeans and promoting firemen the companies maintained their services.

When the strike broke out, the Sister Societies had posted notices in all stations and workplaces informing workers that if they stayed away from work for more than one day, they would be dismissed and only re-employed at the company's discretion on new wages and conditions. The company was determined not to re-employ those whom it believed to be the ringleaders of the strike, which included any VSTP branch executive members. They re-employed skilled workers whom they would have had some difficulty replacing, such as engine drivers, firemen, shunters and conductors, but ruthlessly refused to re-employ less skilled workers, such as brakesmen, pointsmen, station hands and even station clerks, whom they could replace with ease.[152]

Detailed statistical breakdowns of the strike in the SCS enables a closer analysis of the Sister Societies' largest operating company. A total of 779 workers went on strike, of whom 26 returned within the stipulated twenty-four hours, the remainder being dismissed. Only 333 were later re-employed, of whom 183 were taken back as casual workers at wages 10 per cent lower than those received before the strike, and 150 were taken back at a rate 15 per cent lower.[153] Enough workers drifted back by 13 May at Cirebon and Tegal to enable most passenger services to operate as normal, but full goods services could not be restored until the beginning of June. The Pekalongan strikers held out for another week, but the Semarang workers, who had begun the strike, were the last to admit defeat, with only one engine driver and one fireman returning to work before the VSTP leaders called off the strike on 22 May. The following day another nine drivers, nine firemen and eight station workers returned.[154]

The SCS management was concerned at the refusal of so many skilled workers to return on the company's terms. It seems clear that the decision as to whether workers went on stike at a particular station, each of which employed between fifteen and forty men, greatly depended firstly on whether the station master was a member of the VSTP and secondly on whether he favoured

the strike. From 8 May until 10 or 11 May, when they were arrested under the new laws, VSTP leaders toured the lines trying to persuade station masters to join the strike, while managements countered by threatening them with prosecution if they left their posts. Analysing the strike for his directors in the Netherlands, the Head of Operations argued that, where Indonesians in responsible positions, such as station masters, were of *priyayi* origin, they did not go on strike and were a restraining influence on ordinary workers. He reasoned that in future the company should look to the social origins of Indonesians before making these key appointments.[155] No additional evidence has been found to support this assessment, but an advertisement in *Sinar Hindia* after the strike was called off, suggests that railway workers' social origins may have played some part in determining attitudes to the strike. The advertisement sarcastically asked:

> Wanted
> by the editor of Sinar Hindia, people of the 'fine' class, *priyayi* or Javanese *satriya*, competent in
> a) flattery
> b) selfish politics
> c) corruption
> Information to be sent to: Samsi, Chief Editor.[156]

The class antagonism may have been aimed in large part at Regents, *patihs* and other government officials, but was also probably aimed at the Indonesian administrative workers, station masters and supervisory personnel among the 40,000 railway workers who did not join the strike.

Older, skilled workers seem to have been more reluctant to strike, not only in the Sister Societies but also in the State Railways. This reluctance stemmed partly from the conservatism of older workers in any society, concerned for their families and about the difficulty of getting another job, and also from their anxiety to protect their service increments and pension rights, the latter being their only security in old age. However, many did go on strike, perhaps because they shared the discontent of all railway workers and perhaps because of pressure brought to bear on them by the younger, more impatient, workers.[157] Some paid a heavy price. The SJS did not re-employ twenty-nine skilled workers with fifteen or more years service, and the SCS did not re-employ

seventeen similar workers, all of whom were eventually granted considerably smaller pensions than they would otherwise have received.[158]

The Sister Societies made considerable financial savings as a result of the strike. They were over-manned at a time of recession and after the strike were able to employ fewer workers than they had before. They also re-employed strikers at 10 per cent lower wages if they returned before 15 May, or 15 per cent lower if they returned after that date. No strikers were re-employed after 29 May 1923.[159] Finally, strikers were not paid any allowances, were denied a productivity bonus for 1923 and lost their holiday entitlements, and those dismissed lost all or a major part of their pension entitlements. Re-employed strikers were not restored to permanent status until between January and July 1924, depending on the date of their return to work, and did not have their previous years of service counted towards salary increments or pensions until they had worked another five years. The SJS calculated that the loss of wages for the strikers it eventually re-employed would be f25,277.10 in 1923 alone, while the savings to the company on non-payment of productivity bonuses would be another f11,404.20.[160]

Of the 8,265 who went on strike in the State Railways, only 1,596 were re-employed. It was not simply that the State Railways did not wish to re-employ strikers. In fact, it tried to re-employ many more, but could not attract strikers back to work on even worse conditions than those that had caused the strike in the first place. It found particular difficulty in attracting back conductors, engine drivers, and firemen. Of the 496 engine drivers and 750 firemen who went on strike, only 138 and 143 respectively sought re-employment.[161] Resentment at the lower wages paid by the State Railways compared to either the private railway companies or other industries was strong enough for many strikers to refuse re-employment even when it was offered. At the end of August, for example, 552 State Railways strikers at Madiun sought a meeting with the Resident. The Resident later reported that the strikers' spokesman, an ex-draughtsman named Djojodihardjo, took an 'improper attitude', demanding to know 'what the government had decided in relation to the strikers'. The Resident reprimanded him and told the assembled strikers that he was only prepared to listen to them if they asked forgiveness for their actions. Other strikers asked the Regent and the Resident to mediate on their behalf with the State Railways, but the State

Railways inspector present stated sharply that they would only be taken back on the new wages and conditions. The following morning only 167 out of the 552 who had attended the meeting sought re-employment.[162]

What happened to the thousands of strikers either refused or not seeking re-employment? The Resident of Surabaya reported in July that of the 920 strikers not re-employed in that city only 120 had returned to their villages, and of the 800 remaining about 500 were still without work two months after the strike had begun.[163] Some, however, had managed to find work as washmen, house-boys, mechanics or drivers. On 15 August, he reported that only 147 of the original strikers were still without work.[164] Alternative work was much harder to find in Madiun, where in the middle of August the Resident estimated that there were still 1,153 strikers refusing to return to work or being refused re-employment, the majority of whom were unemployed.[165] Further, union as well as government reports indicate that hundreds of dismissed strikers still had no permanent work more than a year later. Presumably, those who did not return to their villages of origin simply joined the thousands of others in kampungs of the major cities who eked out a living as casual day labourers.

The high proportion of skilled workers not seeking re-employment is more difficult to explain. All the railway networks suffered a severe shortage of drivers and firemen for many months after the strike was over. Some engine drivers may have been able to get jobs with the sugar factories, where there was generally a shortage of such workers. The sugar factories would not have been averse to employing former strikers. Even during the strikes in the sugar industry between 1919 and 1921 many factories had quietly employed strikers from rival factories. Other engine drivers may have found work in the Surabaya engineering industries, where their familiarity with operating modern machinery would be valued. Wages for engine drivers in the sugar factories and for skilled metal workers in Surabaya were generally higher than in the railway industry. Many engine drivers who obtained work with a sugar factory may have taken their stokers with them, but alternative work for other stokers would not have been easy to obtain. Conductors also would have found difficulty in obtaining alternative employment because of the specialized nature of their work. The refusal of so many of them to seek re-employment puzzled railway managements at the time, with available reports

indicating that they seem to have gone to a variety of other jobs in the cities, ranging from houseboys to chauffeurs.[166] The skilled workers, especially engine drivers, conductors and station masters, had been in the forefront of VSTP activities over many years, holding most of the branch executive positions and being the staunchest advocates of strike action. A high proportion of them were at least functionally literate and appear to have developed a greater sense of injustice of their situation than the less skilled workers. Rather than accept defeat and even worse conditions of employment, many seem to have decided to move out of the railway industry altogether. It seems that a high proportion of these were younger men more mobile and less immediately concerned about pension rights.

The strike was swiftly and ruthlessly crushed and the VSTP with it. Semaun personally paid a heavy price. He was exiled in August 1923, not to return to his homeland until 1957. The VSTP lost not only its chairman but also many of its central and local leaders, who were either jailed or dismissed from their jobs. Thousands of ordinary members reacted to the inability of their union to protect them from either employers or government by letting their membership lapse. The VSTP went into the strike with about 13,000 members, but when it was all over only 535 remained.

CONCLUSION

THE strikes by pawnshop workers in 1922 and railway workers in 1923 were the largest strikes in Java in the colonial period. The two unions had become involved in Java-wide strikes only reluctantly. Certainly, they had talked for many years of calling general strikes, but their leadership hoped to avoid major confrontations with the colonial government. In both cases the timing of the strikes was outside their control. The pawnshop strike erupted from below, forcing union leaders to try to organize and control local forces. The railway strike was deliberately precipitated by the government when it arrested Semaun. Both strikes were crushed by the combined power of government and managements. The VSTP and the PPPB were the strongest, best organized and financially most viable unions in Java. If strikes in these industries could be easily and ruthlessly crushed there was little hope for workers elsewhere.

The intellectuals who had been involved in organizing urban workers for almost a decade well understood the significance of the defeats in 1922 and 1923. In the Study Clubs that sprang up in Surabaya, Batavia, Bandung and other cities in 1924 they searched for new ways to organize the national movement and bring social and economic improvements to the lives of ordinary people. Publicly, of course, they were forced to maintain an optimistic stance, conscious of the need to sustain morale in difficult times. Samsi, the Chief Editor of the PKI newspaper *Sinar Hindia* at the time of the railway strike, compared the government's suppression of worker discontent with efforts to check the course of a river by building a dam. If the water becomes high enough then the dam will be destroyed by its power.[167] Changing the analogy, in a later article he cautioned capitalists in the colony against seizing the opportunity to suppress their workers even further, for by so doing, he argued, they would only be digging their own graves.[168] In his written self-defence prior to being exiled, Semaun too warned the government that worker discontent could not be suppressed forever.[169] Neither government nor managements were moved by the warnings, confident that they had won an important victory, as indeed they had.

1. For a discussion of the last of the Ethicii Governors-General, van Limburg Stirum, and his social and economic policies, see E. Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in Fragmenten* (Utrecht, 1981) pp. 55-117.
2. Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 31 July 1920, V 14 October 1920–1.
3. Note, Minister of Colonies, 28 September 1920, V 14 October 1920–1.
4. See, V 28 December 1921–B1, passim.
5. Very Secret Circular of the Attorney-General to Heads of Local Governments on Java and Madura, 24 September 1921, enclosed in, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 24 September 1921, V 28 December 1921–B14.
6. Very Secret Circular of the Attorney-General to Heads of Local Governments on Java and Madura, 28 September 1921, V 28 December 1921–B14.
7. See, Director of Government Industries to Governor-General, 13 August 1921, V 28 December 1921–B14.
8. *Sinar Hindia*, 1 November 1920.
9. Surjopranoto, 'Tentoekan dan Tetapkanlah haloean', *Oetoesan Hindia*, 3 November 1920.
10. Semaun and Bergsma, 'Tetapkanlah haloean bersatoe ati', *Sinar Hindia*, 9 November 1920.

11. General Detective Service, Secret Report of 1 to 6 February 1921, No 8, (Extract), Secret Mail Report 1921/181.
12. See, McVey, op. cit., pp. 100-1; *Oetoesan Hindia*, 27 June 1921.
The following unions joined the *Revolutionaire Vakcentrale*: VSTP, VIP-BOW, Havenarbeidersbond, Sarikat Pegawai Pelikan Hindia [workers at the Dutch Petroleum Company — DPM], Chauffeursbond, Metaalbewerkstersbond, Personeel van de Locale Raden [PKLR], Sarekat Pegawai Pertjitakan, Vakgroep SI Semarang, Wono Tamtono, Lendetevisbond (*Volharding*, June 1921).
13. 'Manifest Revolutionair Vakcentrale Hoofdbestuur Semarang', *Soeara Ra'jat*, 16 August 1921.
14. *Sinar Hindia*, 5 September 1922.
15. *Sinar Hindia*, 27 December 1922 and 3 January 1923, in *IPO* (1923), pp. 17-18.
16. See Ingleson, 'Life and Work', op. cit.
17. Head of the Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 2 May 1921, V 18 June 1923–30.
18. Head of the Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 19 December 1921, V 26 February 1925–13.
19. 'Publicatie naar aanleiding van het rapport Peyrott nopens de arbeidsverhoudingen bij den Pandhuisdienst', Yogyakarta, 10 April 1921, Central Executive PPPB, enclosed in Secret Mail Report 1921/985.
20. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 11 April 1921.
21. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 24 May and 2 July 1921.
22. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 25 July 1921.
23. See: 'Ma'loemat, Hoofdbestuur PPPB, tentang Hal Bahaja "Overcompleet", Jogja, 3 August 1921', *Oetoesan Hindia*, 6 and 9 August 1921.
24. 'Ma'loemat DHB, PPPB tentang hal overcompleet', Abdul Muis and Hardjomartojo, *Oetoesan Hindia*, 22 September 1921.
25. Secret Circular No 227 of Daily Executive of the PPPB, to strike agents in PPPB branches and groups on Java and Sumatra, Yogyakarta, 12 October 1921, enclosed in Head of Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 3 November 1921, V 18 June 1923–30.
26. *Sin Po*, 29 September 1921, in *IPO* 39 (1921), p. 47.
27. *Kaoem Moeda*, 26 September 1921, in *IPO*, loc. cit.
28. Stolk, Manager of the Ngupasan Pawnshop to Acting Head of the Pawnshop Service, 12 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30; Announcement of the Central Executive of the PPPB in connection with the strike at Ngupasan, dated Yogyakarta, 2 January 1922, *Sinar Hindia*, 16 January 1922.
29. Resident of Yogyakarta to Governor-General, 20 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
30. Head of the Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 22 January 1922, and Head of the Pawnshop Service to Director of Finance, 16 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
31. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 14 January 1922, V 18 June 1923–30.
32. 'Ma'loemat Hoofdbestuur PPPB, perkara pemogokan Ngoepasan, Jogja, 12 January 1922', *Sinar Hindia*, 16 January 1922.

33. Head of Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 22 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
34. Head of Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 22 January 1922, and Head of Pawnshop Service to Director of Finance, 16 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
35. Head of Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 22 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
36. *Locomotief*, 16 January 1922.
37. *Locomotief*, 16 and 18 January 1922.
38. *Locomotief*, 21 January 1922.
39. *Locomotief*, 27 January 1922.
40. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 20 February 1922.
41. *Neratja*, 24 January 1922, in *IPO* 5 (1922), p. 146.
42. See, *Neratja*, 16 January 1922, in *IPO* 3 (1922), p. 77.
43. 'Warheid en Leugen', *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, February 1922.
44. Head of Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 2 February 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
45. Head of Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 17 February 1922, V 30 June–30.
46. *Neratja*, 9 and 10 February 1922, in *IPO* 7 (1922), pp. 246-7; *Neratja*, 10 April 1922, in *IPO* 16 (1922), p. 91; *Sinar Hindia*, 11 and 27 February 1922.
47. See, Resident of Yogyakarta to Governor-General, 20 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
48. *Neratja*, 4 February 1922, in *IPO* 6 (1922), p. 190.
Suardi made similar arguments in an article entitled 'Ontjat staking deradjat batoer', *Panggoegah*, 20 January 1922, in *IPO* 6 (1922), p. 222.
49. See, Akira Nagazumi, 'The Pawnshop Strike of 1922 and the Indonesian Political Parties', *Archipel* 8 (1974), pp. 201-2.
50. *Locomotief*, 16 January 1922.
51. *Neratja*, 11 March 1922, in *IPO* 11 (1922), p. 396.
52. *Neratja*, 28 January 1922, in *IPO* 5 (1922), p. 150.
53. *Locomotief*, 21 January 1922.
54. *Neratja*, 28 January 1922, in *IPO*, loc. cit.
55. *Locomotief*, 10 February 1922.
56. *Neratja*, 1 February 1922, in *IPO* 5 (1922), p. 147.
57. *Locomotief*, 13 February 1922.
58. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 16 February 1922; *Neratja*, 14 February 1922, in *IPO* 7 (1922), p. 248.
59. *Locomotief*, 21 February, 1922.
60. *Neratja*, 20 February 1922, in *IPO* 8 (1922), p. 292.
61. *Oetoesan Hindia*, 2 February 1922.
62. Head of Pawnshop Service to Governor-General, 22 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
63. Resident of Yogyakarta to Governor-General, 20 January 1922, V 30 June 1923–30.
64. *Sinar Hindia*, 31 July 1922.
65. *Sinar Hindia*, 10 August 1922.
66. *Soeara Boemipoetra*, 1 and 15 March 1923, in *IPO* 15 (1923), p. 94.

67. Quoted in *Indische Volk*, 6 September 1922 and reprinted in *Orgaan van den Bond van Pandhuispersoneel in Ned-Indie*, September 1922.
68. *Doenia Baroe*, 21 June 1922, p. 57.
69. *Verslag Staking Mei 1923* (Verzoeningsraad voor de Spoor- en Tramwegen op Java en Madoera), pp. 15-16. Copy in V 5 November 1925–Z15.
70. Ibid.
71. Chairman of the Management Committee (Wouter Cool) to Directors, 14 November 1923, NIS Cabinet Archives, Nr 400.
72. *Volharding*, January 1923.
73. *Verslag Staking Mei 1923*, pp. 13-14. The Government's Officer for General Matters in the Volksraad, Schrieke, stated that at the time of the strike there were 13,123 Indonesian workers employed by the State Railways earning less than f25 per month. This was more than half of the native workforce (*Handelingen der Volksraad*, 1923, First Session, p. 428).
74. *Verslag Staking Mei 1923*, pp. 13-16.
75. *Rapport arbeids voorwaarden SCS* by J B Peyrott, enclosed in Director of Government Industries to Governor-General, 29 December 1922, Secret Mail Report 1923/13.
76. McVey, op. cit., pp. 134-5.
77. See for example, a speech of Semaun at a VSTP meeting in Semarang on 14 June 1922. A prominent PKI leader present at the meeting, Soeradi, is reported to have criticized Semaun's attitude to industrial action, stating 'he has become cool in thought and cool in his heart also' (*Locomotief*, 15 June 1922).
78. VSTP Central Executive to Directors of Semarang-Joana Steamtram Company, 27 November 1922, Sister Societies Common Archive, 091-912-11.
79. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 2 March 1923, V 1 October 1923–E 14.
80. Sudibio was born in Banjumas in 1881 and at 42 years of age was the oldest Indonesian member of the VSTP central executive at the time of the strike in 1923. He worked as a clerk with the NIS in Semarang before resigning in December 1922 to work as a full time VSTP propagandist and editor of *Si Tetap* (*Kemadjoean Hindia*, 1 September 1923, reporting on his trial at the Bandung District Court on 22 August 1923, charged with spreading offences just before the outbreak of the May strike).
81. During this tour Kadarisman is reported to have told his audiences that if the cost-of-living allowance was withdrawn, then VSTP members should only pay the price they considered proper for goods bought in shops. If the shopowner objected, then the goods should simply be taken and a 'proper' price left behind (Attorney-General, 2 March 1923, V 1 October 1923–E 14).
82. See Appendix 1, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 2 March 1923, V 10 October 1923-E 14.
83. Manifesto VSTP, dated 23 April 1923, copy enclosed in Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1; *Sinar Hindia*, 7 May 1923, in *IPO* 19 (1923), p. 258.
84. 'Report on the public meeting of the VSTP held on the evening of 3/4 February 1925 in the Sarekat Islam office at Semarang', enclosed in V 1 October 1923–E 14.
The opening ceremony of the congress only confirmed the government's

conviction that the VSTP was a tool of the PKI. After Sudibio's welcoming speech, thirty boys and girls from the local Sarekat Islam school marched to the front of the hall and after three of them made a short speech in remembrance of Tan Malaka, the PKI leader exiled in March 1922, they sang three songs, 'Forward Proletariat', 'The Socialist March' and 'The Internationale' (*Sinar Hindia*, 7–14 February 1923, in *IPO* 7 (1923), p. 290 and *Volharding*, February-March 1923).

85. See above pp.118-9, 122-4.
86. McVey, op. cit., pp. 148-9. In a circular to VSTP members on 23 April Semaun lamented: 'Oh, the poverty increases because while wages are reduced, sugar prices become higher, clothing prices begin to increase, coffee prices become higher and the price of rice also increases' (Manifesto VSTP, dated Semarang 23 April 1923, copy enclosed in Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-11).
87. 'Discussion on 12 April 1923 with the Central Executive and a few other representatives of the VSTP' enclosed in Acting Chief Inspector of State Rail and Tramways to Governor-General, 16 April 1923, V 24 August 1923–24.
88. VSTP Manifesto, 23 April 1923, copy enclosed in Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1. The Manifesto argued, in part, that 'if you work, you still find yourself in misery and a sorrowful condition, if you do not work, the result is the same. Therefore, railwaymen, being up or down is a lottery'.
89. See, Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 16 May 1923, V 14 July 1923-15.
90. There are reports of this meeting in *Sinar Hindia*, 7 May 1923, in *IPO* 19 (1923), pp. 256-9, and *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 11 May 1923. Semaun is reported to have also told this meeting: 'I have already explained at Surabaya that it is better to begin a general strike, which is carefully controlled, than to carry out sabotage. We know that a general strike is the best way. For whether we strike or not our lives are still miserable, therefore better not to work' (Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 31 May 1923, V 24 August 1924-24).

    At this meeting a number of speakers promised the full support of their organizations if a railway strike broke out. These included Sumantri from the Semarang branch of Sarekat Islam and the Union of Regional and Municipal Council Workers, Robbers from the Radical Concentration, Ngandino from the Postal Workers Union and Suradi from the Chauffers Union.
91. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 11 May 1923.
92. McVey, op. cit., p. 150.
93. *Sinar Hindia*, 7-14 February 1923, in *IPO* 7 (1923), p. 294.
94. 'Short Report on a closed members' meeting of the VSTP in the SI school at Pungkurweg, 9 March 1923', enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 22 March 1923, V 1 October 1923 – E 14.
95. Speech at a VSTP meeting in Bandung on 12 March 1923, *Matahari*, 17 April 1923, in *IPO* 17 (1923), pp. 176-8.
96. 'Short Report on a closed members' meeting of the VSTP in the SI school at Pungkurweg, 9 March 1923', enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 22 March 1923, V 1 October 1923 – E 14.

97. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 2 March 1923, V 1 October 1923 – E 14.
98. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 22 and 31 March 1923, V 1 October 1923 – E 14.
99. General Secretary to Resident of Semarang, Very Secret Letter N, 16 April 1922, V 1 October 1923 – E 14.
100. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 20 April 1923, V 1 October 1923 – E 14.
101. Enclosure in ibid.
102. Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 16 May 1923, V 14 July 1923–15.
103. Advice of the Council of the Netherlands Indies, 1 June 1923 (No. XLV), V 1 October 1923–24.
104. *Locomotief*, 8 May 1923; Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 31 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
Many of these Executive members were quickly arrested on 9 and 10 May as they made their way from branch to branch urging workers to join the strike. Sudibio, for example, first went to Pekalongan on the afternoon 8 May but was arrested at Tegal early on 10 May (Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 16 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1).
105. *Sinar Hindia*, 8 May 1923, in *IPO* 20 (1923), p. 298.
106. *Locomotief*, 9 May 1923.
107. These paragraphs are based on a detailed report on the strike in Semarang prepared by its Resident, J. van Gigch. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 31 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
108. *Locomotief*, 9 May 1923.
109. The involvement of pupils from the Technical School was a heated topic of debate at a meeting of the Semarang Municipal Council on 11 May 1923. One Indonesian member, Sumali, drew the Council's attention to the fact that pupils from the Technical School were being employed by the SJS as strike breakers. The Chairman of the Council was D.J.A. Westerveld, a long-standing member of the SDAP and a prominent voice for improvements in native housing in Semarang, who noted that the School received a subsidy from the Municipality and also that there was an SJS representative on its Board. He questioned what pressures the pupils were under to work as strike-breakers and sought Council approval for his raising the matter with the Director of the Technical School. The Council divided on the motion, thereby defeating it. The following day the editor of *Locomotief* delivered a strong rebuke to Westerveld, reminding him that the first task of a Mayor was to uphold authority:
'One cannot speak of child labour here, for they are fine, strapping young men who stand on the engines of the town trams. Here is a spontaneously formed corps of young voluntary workers, who are not doing the work of sordid blacklegs, rather they are serving the community by helping to maintain a public service, which people have wilfully tried to dislocate'.
Locomotief, 12 May 1923; Extract from Notes of a meeting of the Semarang Municipal Council, 11 May 1923, enclosed in Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 18 May 1923, V24 August 1924–24.
110. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 10 May 1923, V 17 December 1923–018.

111. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 12 May 1923.
112. 'Resume of a meeting between a deputation of personel from the SCS workshop and the Head of Operations on 12 May', enclosed in Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 16 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.
113. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 9 June 1923, V 24 August 1924–24; Resident of Madiun to Governor-General, 18 August 1923, V 17 December 1923–018; *Neratja*, 15 May 1923.
114. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 10 May 1923, V 17 December 1923–018.
115. Resident of Kediri to Governor-General, 11 August 1923, V 3 November 1923–E16.
116. Resident of Madiun to Governor-General, 15 May 1923, V 3 November 1923–E16.
117. Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 26 May 1924, V 4 August 1924–L10; Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Chief Representative Sister Societies, 20 June 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1; Chairman Executive Committee NIS to Chairman Board of Directors, Semarang, 14 November 1923, NIS Cabinet Archives, Nr 400; Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 31 May 1923, V 24 March 1924–24.
118. A detailed file containing contingency plans for each Residency is in V 28 December 1921–B14.
119. *Locomotief*, 10 May 1923.
120. Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 16 May 1923, V 14 July 1923–15.
121. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 11 May 1923.
122. Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 16 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.
123. Patrol work in the kampungs of Surabaya, which involved squelching through the muddy paths which served as roads and enduring a mosquito plague, was not to the liking of the troops, whose Commander complained as much to the Resident of Surabaya. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 2 June 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
124. *Locomotief*, 14 May 1923.
125. *Locomotief*, 11 May 1923.
126. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 11 May 1923.
127. *Locomotief*,11 May 1923.
128. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 18 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
129. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 14 May 1923.
130. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 13 and 18 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24; *Locomotief*, 16 May 1923.
131. Quoted in McVey, op. cit., p. 151.
132. *Locomotief*, 16 May 1923; *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 16 May 1923.
133. *Locomotief*, 16 May 1923.
The two European members of the VSTP Central Executive, Zeijdel and Sersanzie, resigned a few days after the outbreak of the strike, after being told by the chairman of the Management Committee of NIS that they had to choose between resigning from the VSTP or losing their jobs. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 31 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.

134. Cited in McVey, op. cit., p. 416 n. 134.
135. *Sinar Hindia*, 24 May 1923, in *IPO* 22 (1923), p. 383; Letter addressed to the inhabitants of the Indies by Sugono, VSTP, 16 May 1923, *Sinar Hindia*, 16 May 1923, reprinted in *P.E.B.*, 21 June 1923, copy in Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.
Sutadi, a prominent Indonesian member of the Volksraad, quoting from *Sinar Hindia*, said that 'Semaun's wife was also allowed women visitors but also only two at a time' (*Handelingen der Volksraad*, 13 June 1923, p. 80).
136. Letter addressed to the inhabitants of the Indies by Sugono, VSTP, 16 May 1923, reprinted in *P.E.B.*, 21 June 1923, copy in Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.
Sana literally means 'there', but is used here with the meaning of the colonialists.
137. In fact VSTP leaders complained of violence and intimidation being used by the police and the railway companies to force strikers back to work. See *Sinar Hindia*, 22 May 1923, in *IPO* 22 (1923), pp. 380-1.
138. *Locomotief*, 12 May 1923; *Sinar Hindia*, 12 May 1923, in *IPO* 20 (1923), pp. 300–1.
VSTP leaders responded by dividing the meeting into three sections so that all outside the building forced to disperse by the police were able to attend later.
139. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 13 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
140. Resident of Kediri to Governor-General, 11 August 1923, V 3 November 1923–E16.
141. Resident of Banjumas to Governor-General, 15 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
142. *Locomotief*, 11 and 12 May 1923; Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 31 May 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
143. The *Comite Kemanusiaan* had been in existence in Surabaya since sometime in 1921. It used various methods to raise money and rice, including printing and distributing donation cards for circulation in the kampung, arranging for other voluntary bodies, such as football clubs and cultural associations, to raise money through special performances and soliciting gifts from wealthier members of the Surabaya community. Some idea of the extent of its operations can be seen from the fact that in a three week period between 10 June and 2 July 1923 it raised f436.23, comprising donations from the Sarekat Postel Committee in Surabaya, proceeds of a public meeting of the Surabaya branch of Sarekat Islam and donations from Football clubs. In the same period it paid out f383.85, mainly in small amounts of f5, f10 or f15, but including sums of money sufficient to send striking railway workers or their families back to their home villages. See, *Kemadjoean*, 11 June 1923.
144. Assistant Resident of Semarang to Resident of Semarang, 1 June 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
145. Ibid.
146. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 16 June 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
147. *Sinar Hindia*, 29 May 1923, in *IPO* 24 (1923), p. 475.
148. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 31 May 1923, V 24 August

1924–24; *Sinar Hindia*, 12 May 1923, in *IPO* 20 (1923), pp. 300–2.

149. *Sinar Hindia*, 12 May 1923, in *IPO* 20(1923), pp. 300–2.

150. Writing in exile in the Netherlands Communist Party newspaper *De Tribune*, Tan Malaka was critical of Semaun in September 1922 for being too cautious in his unwillingness to support an immediate railway strike. Malaka argued that 'In the Indies if the discontent rises sharply then people can always strike. The absence of a winter, the small needs and the hospitality of the people are guarantees that the struggle can be sustained for many months if necessary'. Quoted in Harry A. Poeze, *Tan Malaka: Strijder voor Indonesie's Vrijheid. Levensloop van 1897 tot 1945* ('s-Gravenhage, 1976), p. 216.

Dutch colonial officials often used a similar argument to stress the dangers of allowing unions leaders to organize strikes. Semaun had argued in a similar vein in an interview published in *Locomotief*, 29 September 1921, though he generally made a more careful assessment of the need for a strike fund in the event of a lengthy strike.

151. 'Bulletin of the Daily Executive of the Central Leadership of the Rail and Tramway Strike,' enclosed in Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 8 June 1923, V 24 August 1924–24. For reports on meetings between members of the VSTP central executive with the private railway and tramway companies on 22 and 23 May see *Locomotief*, 22 and 23 May 1923.

152. Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 16 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

153. Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Chief Representative Sister Societies, 20 June 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

154. Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 23 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

155. Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 23 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

156. *Sinar Hindia*, 22 May 1923, in *IPO* 22 (1923), p. 381.

157. See Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 16 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

158. Chief Representative to Directors, 5 December 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-11.

159. Head of Operations SCM Tegal to Directors, 29 May 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

160. Chief Representative to Directors, 30 November 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-11. As an 'act of generosity' the SJS paid 50 per cent of its normal productivity bonus for 1923. Even more generously, the Chief Representative of the Sister Societies in June decided against withdrawing the strikers' bonus for 1922, which had still not been paid when the strike broke out. Chief Representative to Directors, 4 June 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

161. 'Memorandum by Chief Representative, Sister Societies, 7 July 1923', enclosed in Chief Representative to Directors, 12 July 1923, Sister Societies Common Archives, 745-1.

162. Resident of Madiun to Governor-General, 5 September 1923, V 17 December 1923–O18.

163. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 14 July 1923, V 3 November 1923–E16.
164. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 15 August 1923, V 17 December 1923–O18.
165. Resident of Madiun to Governor-General, 18 August 1923, V 17 December 1923–O18.
166. Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 23 June 1923, V 24 August 1924–24.
167. *Sinar Hindia*, 19 May 1923, in *IPO* 21 (1923), pp. 350-1.
168. *Sinar Hindia*, 3 June 1923, in *IPO* 24 (1923), p. 478.
169. 'Memorie van verdediging van Semaun', 19 July 1923, V 1 October 1923–E14.

VI
Repression

As the government crackdown on unions intensified in the aftermath of the pawnshop and railway strikes, more and more it was the communists alone who were actively involved in union activities. In part, this reflected the decline of Sarekat Islam from the early 1920s. It had been weakened by the Section B Affair, the subsequent jailing of Tjokroaminoto and other leaders and by internal leadership quarrels. Its efforts to strengthen itself against a more dynamic PKI by imposing party discipline in October 1921 only rebounded to its disadvantage when many of its most active branch members opted for the PKI. The failure of the pawnshop workers' strike and the collapse of the PFB further weakened Sarekat Islam. Both PPPB and the PFB were linked to it through their central leaders. No new leaders emerged, with the notable exception of Haji Agus Salim, and even he was more interested in giving intellectual drive to the party than being directly involved in labour unions.

The organization of urban workers was left to the communists. While others lost heart, the communist leaders' commitment remained undiminished. McVey has charted in detail the PKI's shift away from its urban base in 1923 and 1924 and the ideological debate within the party as to its future course in the face of the government's relentless tightening of the restrictions on it. The party decided in September 1924 to focus once more on the urban areas, urging branches to concentrate on developing labour unions. The momentous December congress at Kota Gede, just outside Yogyakarta, decided to move towards a rebellion and as part of these preparations confirmed the September decision to focus on

urban workers. Through 1925 PKI activists redoubled their efforts to develop strong labour unions and to use unions as points of entry into the workplaces.

The PKI was proud of its involvement in labour unions. After the failure of the railway strike it was quick to point out that it was PKI members who had borne the brunt of the government's wrath:

> During the strikes it was almost entirely PKI members who were arrested. This shows clearly that it is no mere child's play for the PKI, but that the PKI is a party which seeks justice and encounters stones and thorns along the way.

In the poetic language that marked many of the articles in PKI newspapers, readers were urged to stand behind the PKI in these difficult times:

> Brother revolutionaries!
> Be faithful to the PKI and the 'Soeara Ra'jat'. Our sea is full of rocks and sandbanks. Let us trust one another and resolutely steer our ship, flying the communist flag from its mast, to the land of security and prosperity which we all desire.[1]

Semaun and Tan Malaka had tempered their Marxist convictions with a pragmatic realization that few urban workers in Indonesia were well educated politically and even fewer had any developed class consciousness. Those who took charge of the PKI after their exile (Tan Malaka was arrested in February 1922 and soon after exiled from the colony) were less circumspect in their analysis of Indonesian society. Many saw urban wage earners as potentially a revolutionary proletariat, requiring only correct leadership to join a movement to overthrow colonialism and capitalism. The European community read the ideological outpourings and listened to the platform rhetoric and, for the most part, took it at face value. Pressure mounted on the government to crush the PKI once and for all. European newspaper editors were the strongest public advocates of draconian action, but employer organizations as well as central and regional officials also increasingly called for an end to all communist activity. The Resident of Pasuruan reflected the view of many Europeans when in March 1924 he asked the Governor-General why the government had been so long-suffering with the communists:

Just as the government takes measures against the importation of morphine and guards against contagious moulds in fruit, so it must take action against the infection of ideas.[2]

The Indies government seized on the communist leadership as justification for its suppression of labour unions in 1925 and 1926. It might be argued that this was not an unreasonable attitude, given that the PKI had decided in December 1924 to move towards a rebellion and to this end organize among the urban workforce. However much genuine social and economic grievances and local labour relations were the bases of strikes, neither government nor employers could see beyond the communist leaders of the unions themselves. But it probably would have made little difference if union leaders had not also been PKI members. Employers had consistently refused to recognize labour unions irrespective of their leaders' political affiliations, in general paying the minimum wages they could get away with and only conceding improvements under duress. The government, for its part, had moved a long way from its cautiously neutral position of 1919 and 1920. Both the pawnshop and the railway strikes had been ruthlessly crushed. Pawnshop union leaders could hardly be accused of being communists, and even though many VSTP leaders were PKI members, at the time of the 1923 strike the party had yet to move beyond moderate politics.

Strikes were increasingly portrayed as simply the products of communist agitation and propaganda, with labour unions linked to the PKI through their leaders described as nothing more than instruments of communist subversion. While some government officials in the late 1910s and early 1920s had been able to see beyond communist leadership to workers' deep-seated grievances, by 1923 the distinction was lost on all but a few. It was readily admitted that workers were not prosperous, but they were believed to be content with their lot. Any disturbances were seen as instigated by a small number of hotheads stirred up by communist propaganda.

The changes in PKI strategy and tactics from late 1924, with the renewed emphasis on raising the consciousness of urban workers, are important to an understanding of the subsequent development of labour unions. However, this tells us more about the motivations and intentions of union leaders than about urban workers themselves. It does not explain why urban workers joined

labour unions or why so many continued to go on strike, despite their knowledge, and in many cases direct experience, of the hardships suffered by strikers in earlier years. Government and employer assertions to the contrary, worker militancy was not created by communist agitation. Many strikes continued to occur in industries where communist union leaders had only partial control over both the timing and the course of the strikes.

RAILWAY AND PAWNSHOP WORKERS

THE VSTP was decimated by the defeat of its 1923 strike. Not only did it lose most of its members — after the strike only 535 remained out of the pre-strike figure of almost 13,000 — but, more importantly, many of its central and branch leaders languished in jail. With Semaun exiled, Sugono became chairman, a position he retained until the union's demise at the end of 1926. The VSTP had always been closely linked to the PKI, usually sharing offices with the party and other PKI-connected unions. After the strike this connection became even closer. Most branch leaders were still very young and were heavily involved in PKI and Sarekat Rakjat activities as well as in a multitude of other unions.

Brief biographical sketches of three branch leaders illustrate the kinds of young men who were active in the VSTP after May 1923. Mas Sunario was a leading member of the Kertosono branch in east Java. Born in 1896 and educated at the HBS in Surabaya, until he left at the end of fourth class to get married he lived in the house of the chairman of the local branch, who was an engineer with the State Railways. Sunario's job was to organize courses for State Railways workers, for which he received f50 per week. He seems to have continued this work after the strike and, because he had no other job, earned extra money from the union by organizing among workers in the Kediri Steamtram Company.

Sugeng was the chairman of the VSTP Jember branch when arrested at the end of 1926. Then 23 years old, he was born in the east Java town of Madiun where he completed the sixth class of HIS. After brief spells in the Second Class Native school at Bondowoso and the trade school at Surabaya he entered the State Railways telegraphists school in Bandung. On graduation in 1920 he was posted to a number of stations before being sent to Jember at the end of 1921. It was at Jember that he joined the VSTP. He was one of the many victims of the State Railways' economy drive,

losing his job in October 1922. Like so many other literate and relatively well-educated railway workers who were sacked, he was recruited by the VSTP as a paid official, first as a commissioner and then as secretary of the Jember sub-branch. Sugeng was arrested during the railway strike, sentenced to eighteen months' jail and not released until October 1924. Out of work and with little money, he returned to Jember where he lived in a rented house together with the secretary and chairman of the Jember branch of Sarekat Rakjat. The house doubled as the Jember office of the VSTP, of which he became chairman in late 1925. He earned his living from his VSTP position together with work as an organizer for the PKI in the Jember area and the ownership of two old cars which he leased out as taxis.[3]

Finally, there was Salimun, from July 1924 the chairman and treasurer of the Pekalongan branch of the VSTP. A former conductor in the SCS, dismissed during the railway strike, he was a prominent Pekalongan leader of the VSTP, the PKI and the Sarekat Rakjat. He too had experienced a colonial jail, receiving a four month sentence in October 1923 for writing an article which contravened the all-embracing Penal Code. After his dismissal by the SCS, Salimun lived on his small union salary and had no fixed abode, reportedly sleeping in the houses of friends. He was particularly active in the second half of 1926 organizing among SCS workers on behalf of the VSTP and the Sarekat Rakjat, of which he was treasurer.[4]

Regaining members and reviving branches was a slow and difficult task. Many railway and tramway workers had lost faith in the VSTP and its ability to protect and advance their interests. The setback of key VSTP leaders being in jail was compounded by the tactics of railway companies in not re-employing workers who were office-holders at branch level, unless their skills were essential. After the strike many, perhaps a majority, of office-holders at central and branch levels were no longer railway or tramway employees but were paid union officials. More importantly, many of the skilled workers in the workshops, stations and trains on whom the VSTP had so much depended for its strength were either not re-employed or were subdued as a result of their experience. The reluctance of railway and tramway workers to rejoin the union was a constant topic in *Si Tetap*, the twice-monthly Malay language VSTP newspaper. In December 1924, for example, workers were urged no longer to be afraid of employers

or the government and to join their union. Only the VSTP could protect them during the recession: '. . .[when] the light becomes darker and the rain threatens, seek an umbrella! No? Then you will become wet through your own fault'.[5]

Despite VSTP leaders' concern that railway and tramway workers had been cowed by their defeat in 1923, membership did steadily increase. At the end of 1924 it had grown to 4,231, and by November 1925 to 8,292 in seventy-seven branches.[6] Meetings were held in 1924 in most places where the union had previously been active, and small groups of workers were exhorted to be proud of the VSTP's achievements despite the failure of the strike. Gatherings of between twenty and a hundred were held in PKI offices, Sarekat Rakjat schools and local cinemas, addressed by full-time propagandists on local as well as wider issues. The 1923 strike was a constant topic of discussion, with propagandists and branch leaders admitting that its failure had exposed the weakness of labour unions in a colonial society. Workers were urged to strengthen their union by persuading workmates to join. Only in common action was there any chance of improving their lot in life. Sugono was particularly critical of members who had almost millenarian expectations of the VSTP but who did not take their membership seriously and did not pay their dues regularly:

> Remember brothers, the VSTP is an organization which opposes all oppression and arbitrary action. If its members only want to play around, then the VSTP will definitely not be able to work miracles for them.[7]

Si Tetap was an important vehicle for the revival of the union, printing news from local branches as well as articles in simple language urging railway workers not to lose heart at a time of recession and repression. There were frequent reports of arbitrary treatment, bad conditions or poor housing and health, and workers were assured that their union was still in regular contact with railway and tramway companies, taking up grievances and injustices. Small victories were given major space, such as the reinstatement of a worker after an unfair dismissal or obtaining free tramway passes for SJS workers.[8] To the critics of the VSTP who accused it of being nothing more than a communist front, Sugono replied that while the VSTP was a trade union concerned with workers' economic interests it was, of necessity, also involved in the political arena:

The VSTP must work in the political field, not only because economic matters are very closely connected with matters of government, but because workers become the victims of employers' actions when their interests are not protected by government.
The VSTP is convinced that it is impossible for the government to protect workers' interests, in order to improve their lot in life, if workers themselves are unable to get control of the government.
The VSTP is convinced about this, but at this point in time only works in the political field on matters directly concerning labour. It leaves to political organizations the question of how the state should be governed. But the VSTP is prepared to support a political party which truly works towards freeing workers from the shackles which bind them.[9]

The Prupuk branch, in the Pekalongan Residency, was typical of VSTP branches after the strike. Formed in the middle of 1924 with about forty members, at its peak in November 1925 it had recruited all the Indonesian workers at the State Railways station at Prupuk. Its president was a second class clerk at the station, its secretary a clerk, its treasurer a foreman telegraphist and its two commissioners a station officer and a freight wagon foreman. As part of his work the treasurer travelled each day along the Prupuk-Purwokerto line and used the opportunity to collect subscriptions and spread union propaganda. Of the around seventy members at the beginning of 1926, thirty-three were also members of the local Sarekat Rakjat, which caused the head of the western division of the State Railways to talk of a 'nest of communists at Prupuk'.[10]

The VSTP Cirebon executive was concerned that its brothers in Prupuk might be too enthusiastic in their action, and in September 1925 wrote asking for information on what they were doing, because, it said: 'We are afraid that perhaps, in their anger, the brothers will do things which go beyond the limits and in so doing they will look neither to the right nor the left'.[11] Central executive control over branches had never been very strong but after the 1923 strike it was even more tenuous. Harrassed by police and government officials, lacking experienced leaders of the stature of Semaun and suffering from a shortage of money, VSTP central leaders tried hard to maintain surveillance and control of branches but found the task beyond them. As if lack of leadership and money were not bad enough, frequent confiscation of records in police raids on its offices restricted Semarang leaders' ability to create a strong, centrally controlled body.

The central executive did, however, move quickly to dampen any branch enthusiasm for strikes. It knew full well that the union lacked a fighting fund and that in the prevailing political climate any union-led strike would simply give government and employers another excuse to smash the union. In March 1925 conductors in the Purwokerto branch urged Semarang leaders to take strong action to improve wages. The central executive refused, arguing that as the union organization was not strong and the times were unfavourable for labour unions it could not contemplate organizing a strike. Unconvinced, the Purwokerto branch replied by again urging Semarang to take strong action, to no avail.[12] Although there were no union-organized strikes in the railway and tramway industry after 1923, small-scale strikes continued to break out from time to time as workers took their own protest action. On 24 April 1925, for example, all eighteen day-wage labourers employed at the State Railways' loading depot at Cikampek stopped work because they were refused a wage advance for Lębaran. As part of its economy drive in 1923 the State Railways stopped paying wage advances for Lebaran. The labourers struck in vain, for the State Railways simply dismissed them and recruited others.[13]

The VSTP continued to advance members' interests to employers. In September 1925 it served on the Sister Societies its first major log of claims since 1921, drawing attention to the deterioration in wages and conditions since late 1922. It sought a return to 1922 wage scales, improved allowances, a reduction in the working day, better rest and holiday provisions and access to free health care for all. It also revived the idea of an arbitration board for the railway and tramway industry, a proposal it had been advancing for more than five years. The proposed board would hear workers' grievances and make decisions binding on both employers and employees.[14] The Chief Representative of the Sister Societies merely noted the requests, pointing out in reply that since July of that year there had been some improvements in wages and conditions for many workers. Privately, he dismissed the VSTP letter as simply a tactic so that when a strike broke out — as he was convinced would happen in the near future — the union could claim that it was not responsible because it had given the company prior warning. Although he was prepared to admit that local union leaders might be motivated by a desire to improve workers' conditions, the central executive of the union was differently motivated: ' . . .I see members of the central executive, however,

as just as great troublemakers as the communists, who now have caused numerous strikes at Surabaya'.[15]

In April 1925 the private railway companies decided that any employee caught spreading communist propaganda during working hours would be dismissed.[16] The smaller companies applied the policy vigorously, often interpreting it to mean that they had general support for dismissing not only PKI propagandists but also VSTP activists. The larger companies were more circumspect, distinguishing between VSTP and PKI propaganda. Nevertheless, increasing numbers were dismissed, including a conductor for offering passengers a communist leaflet, a station clerk for recruiting fellow workers for the PKI and an engine driver found with communist literature in his pocket.[17]

Whereas VSTP leaders emerged from the strike chastened but united in their determination to rebuild the union, the leaders of the Union of Pawnshop Workers (PPPB) were bitterly divided. The failure of the 1922 strike was a severe blow to the union. The PPPB was also greatly affected by the increasingly bitter struggle between communist and non-communist leaders for overall control of the labour movement. The communist Revolutionary Federation of Trade Unions (RVC) had publicly supported the pawnshop workers' strike, but after its failure the communist press was sharply critical of PPPB leaders, accusing them of incompetence and indifference to the fate of dismissed strikers. Communist labour leaders saw an opportunity to gain control of PPPB branches and in time seize control of the central executive.

The strained relations between communist union leaders and Surjopranoto, evident since 1920, worsened after Sarekat Islam forced them to choose between it and the PKI in October 1921. They came to a head in 1924, ostensibly over a personal conflict between Surjopranoto and his one-time colleague Sosrokardono. For nearly a decade these two men had worked together in Sarekat Islam, the Pawnshop Workers Union and the Union of Sugar Factory Workers. Imprisoned for his part in the Section B Affair in which Sarekat Islam was implicated (at the time he was secretary of the Central Sarekat Islam), Sosrokardono was released early in December 1923. A year later he resigned from Sarekat Islam and joined the PKI. Intent on protesting against the leadership of Sarekat Islam — and in particular against Salim and Tjokroaminoto for increasingly stressing the Islamic base of the party — rather than making a personal conversion to communism, Sosrokardono became

involved in a fringe political group. Surjopranoto also broke with Sarekat Islam in 1923, but retained close links with its Yogyakarta leadership.[18]

In a symbolic act of support, Sosrokardono was re-elected chairman of the PPPB in July 1923, even though he was still in jail. Surjopranoto was elected vice-chairman, but until Sosrokardono's release acted as chairman. On his release Sosrokardono went to live and work in Surabaya. Although the PPPB central executive was based in Surabaya, its daily executive (which effectively ran the organization), its printery and its fortnightly newspaper were based in Yogyakarta. Finding it impossible to manage the union from Surabaya, late in December Sosrokardono resigned and Surjopranoto took over again as chairman.[19] It was the beginning of a personal estrangement for the two men.

Meanwhile PKI leaders were working hard to move the PPPB into their sphere of influence. By the beginning of 1924 the Semarang, Bandung, Kediri and Madiun branches all had communist leaders antagonistic to Surjopranoto. Most had never worked in a pawnshop, but offered leadership to members whose morale was low in the aftermath of the strike. They argued that, given the attitude of the colonial government, an effective labour union had to be involved in political as well as union activities. This was in sharp conflict with Surjopranoto's long-standing insistence that union and political activities should be kept clearly separate. The PKI newspaper *Sinar Hindia* published frequent personal attacks on Surjopranoto and criticism of his divisive role in the PFB, the PPPB and the labour union federation.[20] The Sarekat Islam newspaper *Hindia Baroe*, published in Batavia by Haji Agus Salim, responded in like manner, referring on one occasion to the Semarang branch of the PPPB as 'a noxious plant'.[21]

In the first half of 1924 the communist-led branches stepped up their campaign against the central executive and were supported in their criticism of Surjopranoto by Sosrokardono, who blamed the central executive for the PPPB's failure to recover its pre-strike strength. Branches of all unions had always been tardy in forwarding membership dues to union headquarters, but now the dissident PPPB branches used them as a weapon in their struggle. Meetings of the Semarang, Madiun and other east Java branches were increasingly devoted to political issues rather than union affairs and calls were made by local leaders for the PPPB

openly to advocate class struggle.[22] A Semarang branch meeting at the end of April, for example, was held in a room draped with red flags to commemorate May Day and, after strong anti-colonial speeches, agreed to an executive motion that the branch had a responsibility to propagate its views not only in Semarang but throughout Java.[23]

Fearing that the communists were taking advantage of the weakness of the union after its 1922 defeat in order to take it over from within, in May 1924 the PPPB central executive followed the example of Sarekat Islam by imposing rigorous discipline on its branches. All branches were informed that as the PPPB was concerned with labour matters only and not with political matters all discussion of political matters at branch meetings was prohibited. Consuls and branch executive members were also prohibited from discussing political matters in the name of the union or of speaking at meetings of other organizations without the permission of the central executive. Moreover, branches were instructed to organize new elections for their executives by the beginning of June, with membership henceforth restricted to present or former pawnshop workers. Others could only stand for election if they had received prior approval from the central executive and such approval was conditional on a written agreement not to advocate political issues within the union. Finally, branches were instructed to restrict propaganda activities to their own areas and required to report monthly to the central executive.[24]

The communist-led branches had little choice but to fight or concede defeat. The Semarang branch, under its chairman, Sumantri, a leading PKI member and a member of the editorial board of the PKI Semarang newspaper *Sinar Hindia*, took the lead in confronting the central executive. At a closed meeting in Semarang on 1 June there was heavy debate between the central executive, led by Surjopranoto, and the Semarang branch executive, led by Sumantri. Semarang demanded that the PPPB abandon its policy of involvement in labour union activities only and become directly involved in political activity. Surjopranoto rejected the plea, whereupon Sumantri threatened to move against the central executive. The meeting ended in acrimony. A few days later, Sumantri visited Surjopranoto in Yogyakarta bringing with him a Semarang demand that it retain 25 per cent of its membership dues and that it be free to use the money to support a propaganda drive throughout Java. Again Surjopranoto adamantly refused to concede

any ground and Sumantri returned to Semarang empty-handed. Shortly afterwards reports reached Yogyakarta that the Semarang branch was trying to establish a rival union.[25]

Rival forces were marshalled for the Solo Congress of the PPPB scheduled for early June 1924. Despite the central executive's attempt to force new branch elections before the congress, hoping thereby to wrest control from the communists, Sosrokardono emerged victorious. After his election as chairman he moved a successful motion of no confidence in the previous central executive. The union, he announced, would henceforth be known as the *Perserikatan Pegawai Pagadaian* (PPP), dropping the word *bumiputera* (native) to indicate that all pawnshop workers, irrespective of race, could join. He demanded that Surjopranoto hand over the union records, finances and printery to the new union. Surjopranoto refused, saying that he would take the matter to the courts rather than agree with Sosrokardono's proposals for a special commission to arbitrate the dispute. Later he issued a circular in the name of the old central executive in which he argued that voting at the congress was irregular. He was particularly critical that many delegates, particularly from Semarang, Kudus and Bandung, were not pawnshop workers, a veiled criticism of communist infiltration of PPPB branches. Members were informed that a motion of no confidence in Sosrokardono had already been prepared by some branches and in the meantime were urged to send all correspondence and membership fees to the PPPB Yogyakarta offices as usual.[26]

PPPB branches were now openly lobbied for support by the Sosrokardono and Surjopranoto factions (based in Solo and Yogyakarta respectively), both of which claimed legitimate leadership of the union.[27] Slowly, the Surjopranoto faction gained the upper hand, but the dispute gravely weakened the union as a whole because its leaders spent most of their energy publicly denouncing each other. There was, in fact, a third union seeking members among pawnshop workers, the PBOH, the union of Indonesian managers and deputy managers, formed in 1920. Renamed Mardi Utomo in 1924, it tried unsuccessfully to recruit lower level pawnshop workers in 1924 and 1925. Unity Committees were established to try to bring the warring factions together, but to no avail. In August 1925 there were newspaper reports that committees of dismissed PPPB strikers had been established in Malang, Banjumas, Semarang and Yogyakarta demanding that

the printery, the major asset of the PPPB, be sold and its proceeds distributed to those strikers who had paid such a heavy price for their support of the union's strike call.[28] The Sosrokardono group supported this proposal, and may indeed have been behind the establishment of the strike committees. Realizing that Surjopranoto had no intention of handing the printery over to them, they may have decided that it was more expedient to demand that dismissed strikers get the benefit of it.

The two factions continued through 1925 to assert their claim to true leadership of the PPPB. Surjopranoto presided over the PPPB congress at Yogyakarta at the beginning of July, but while lamenting that Sosrokardono refused to hand over membership cards and inventories from the former Surabaya head office, contemptuously dismissed his opponents. Shortly afterwards, the PPPB published a pamphlet in which Surjopranoto described the Sosrokardono faction in Solo as merely a bunch of communists. The Sosrokardono faction responded by organizing its own congress in Surabaya at the end of August, at which it resolved no longer to recognize the Surjopranoto faction as a trade union but merely as a Sarekat Islam branch with some members who were pawnshop workers. A new union was established, the *Kumpulan Pegawai Pegadaian* (KPP), with its headquarters in Surabaya. In a clear counter to Surjopranoto's charge that Sosrokardono was merely a front for the communists, KPP regulations stipulated that only pawnshop workers could be leaders and that outsiders would only be accepted as members without voting rights. The practical problem was Surjopranoto's refusal to hand over either PPPB records or its printery and other equipment. Speakers deplored his attitude, but by resolving that both sides to the dispute should abide by a decision of a commission under Tjokroaminoto's chairmanship the congress recognized that court action might not succeed. It still argued, though, that the property rightly belonged to ex-strikers and to the new union of pawnshop workers.[29]

While the bickering continued at the leadership level, ordinary pawnshop workers voted with their feet. In the middle of 1925 the PPPB had only about 2,000 members, compared to around 4,500 at its pre-strike peak, and of these no more than 1,000 paid their dues regularly. The Sosrokardono faction, the KPP, seems to have had considerably fewer members. Indeed, the embarassingly small size of its membership probably accounts for its refusal to make precise figures public. Reports on PPPB meetings in daily

newspapers as well as in its own organ, *Soeara Boemipoetra*, indicate that grievances were still deeply felt by members. Now, though, there were few calls from the floor for strike action: the failure in 1922 had quashed belief in the effectiveness of the strike weapon.

RECESSION, WORKERS AND STRIKES

THE recession continued into 1924 and 1925 with wages of urban workers reduced from the peak levels of 1922 and many hard-won improvements in conditions removed. Labour shedding in the manufacturing and service industries was common, with unskilled workers more badly affected than skilled workers. Perhaps because skilled workers were such a small proportion of the workforce and difficult to replace, employers were more reluctant to retrench them during the recession.

Available information on wage levels and the cost of living for urban workers has to be treated with caution. The most recent researchers in this area have warned against placing too much reliance on year-to-year changes because of the difficulty of obtaining accurate raw statistics, as well as problems in their interpretation.[30] The following table does, however, give some indication of general trends and enables labour union activity to be seen against the background of workers' major concerns about wages, prices and employment.[31]

	Cost-of-living index for Indonesians	*Rice price index*
1921	132.5	191.6
1922	109.0	140.8
1923	102.0	131.3
1924	106.5	146.4
1925	105.5	145.0
1926	109.5	152.8
1927	100.5	139.7

* 1913 = 100

It can be seen from the first column that there was an increase in the cost of living between 1923 and 1926 followed by a significant decline in 1927. The rice price column is even more revealing

for it shows an increase of 15.1 per cent in 1924, a marginal 1.4 per cent reduction in 1925 and a further 7.8 per cent increase in 1926. In general, wages fell between the beginning of 1923 and the beginning of 1926, with small increase through 1926. There were, of course, considerable variations from industry to industry and from city to city, with individual wage rates depending on the prevailing labour market. The 7.5 per cent increase in the cost of living in the three years after the railway strike, at the same time as money wages were reduced, was the economic base for worker unrest in these years.

Communist leaders, committed ideologically to raising the consciousness of urban workers, seized their opportunity to capitalize on economic conditions. They redoubled their efforts to recruit workers into labour unions, particularly in the major cities of Surabaya, Semarang and Batavia. While PKI leaders were virtually the only people trying to organize urban workers after 1923, strikes in these years cannot simply be explained by communist propaganda and instigation, as the government argued. On the contrary, most strikes continued to be outbreaks from below, with union leaders having little control over them. An analysis of some of these strikes shows that urban workers were still prepared to take spontaneous action, in the belief that this was the only way to obtain redress of their grievances.

Workers in the printing industry had been among the first to force wage rises through strike action in 1919 and 1920. The plethora of local printing unions had been replaced in most cities by a branch of the *Sarekat Buruh Tjitak* (SBT). The substantial improvements in wages and conditions conceded by employers in 1920 led to a long period of calm. Few strikes in the industry were reported after 1921, and membership of SBT branches fell away. There was a resurgence of unrest in the industry from late 1924, paralleled by a strong revival in SBT membership and activity. SBT branches operated independently of each other and, with the exception of the Yogyakarta branch which was linked to Sarekat Islam, almost all leaders were PKI members who were involved in a wide range of local unions. Government and employers blamed the renewed unrest on the communist-led SBT. In reality, the revival of the SBT was a consequence of recession-hit employers reducing wages, removing some of the improved conditions gained in 1920 and retrenching workers. Workers in the printing industry had joined unions in 1919 and 1920 in the expectation that these

would assist in the fight for better wages. With that goal achieved, they lost interest in the union. Now, with their standard of living, even their jobs, under threat they again turned to the union in the hope that it would defend their livelihood.

The very success of their strikes in 1919 and 1920 may well have made printing workers over-confident. Then there was an acute shortage of skilled workers in the industry. This, combined with full order books and healthy profit margins, persuaded employers to give in to their demands. In late 1924 and through 1925 the industry was much less profitable, with over-capacity in some sectors and skilled labour much easier to obtain. Printing workers now found that their bargaining power was no greater than that of other groups in the urban economy and that striking was no longer effective.

In November 1924 a major strike involving nearly 400 workers broke out at the Vorkink and the Preangerbode printeries in Bandung, publishers of the local newspapers. The immediate cause was the dismissal of five compositors who were accused of being lazy. There is no evidence as to whether the compositors were foremen or long-standing older workers — in which case they would have developed strong patronage links in the workplaces and the kampungs — but clearly their fellow workers felt strongly that they had been treated unjustly. A number of workers took their complaints to the Bandung branch of the SBT, which immediately organized a meeting at the local Sarekat Rakjat school. There workers decided to strike until employers either re-employed the dismissed compositors or paid them three months' wages in lieu of notice.

The companies refused both demands, countering with an ultimatum that workers return to work immediately or be sacked. A letter containing the ultimatum was delivered to all strikers. Three men only replied: two said that they could not return until they had consulted the SBT chairman and the third said that he did not wish to return at all. All three were immediately sacked for their impertinence and civil action was begun to recover wages already paid in advance. Those willing to continue working were brought to work by armed police. Newspaper deliverers were also accompanied on their rounds by police agents in order to prevent them being intimidated by strikers. The strike lasted for over two months but in the end workers were forced to return on the companies' terms. European employees and labour brought from

Batavia together with those still willing to work kept the printeries operating. Financial help to the companies seems to have been provided by the Java-wide Printing Employers Association, which was determined to support its members against strikes.[32]

The SBT was also involved in strikes in Yogyakarta in April and May 1925. The May strike was a short-lived spontaneous protest by eighty workers at the Indonesian Printery who objected to ten binders and compositors being made redundant. The protest failed to move the company, with those willing to work doing so under police protection and additional labour being brought from outside Yogyakarta.[33] In the April strike the union itself seems to have taken the initiative — at the workers' request according to union leaders — in serving a list of demands on the Buning Printing Company on 15 April. The list included demands for a 40 per cent wage rise, improved bonuses and a daily meal allowance of 10 cents. Immediately upon receiving the demands, the company called its workers together and told them that it would not agree to them, warning that if they went on strike they would not have jobs to return to. Workers should have been paid for the previous month that afternoon, but the company delayed payment for a day, fearing that with money in their pockets workers would surely strike. Undeterred, employees met that night at the house of Tedjomartojo, chairman of the Yogyakarta SBT and a former PPPB leader. The following morning, 16 April, only seven out of a total workforce of 119 turned up for work. Over the next few days Tedjomartojo and other SBT leaders were unsuccessfully pressured by the local police commissioner to persuade workers to end their strike. Some strikers were so afraid of being accosted by police or European employees of the company that they lived in Tedjomartojo's house until the strike was over. On 1 May, 102 workers were still on strike, but over the next few days most appear to have given in and returned on the company's terms. The company's tactic of withholding a month's wages had succeeded in starving strikers back to work.[34]

Like the printing industry, the hospital system in colonial Java was a large employer of labour. All major and many minor cities had a public hospital, which in the twentieth century employed increasing numbers of Indonesian nurses as well as less skilled workers. The unionization of growing numbers of workers in government employ stimulated the formation of the *Perserikatan Pegawai Geneeskundigen Dienst* (Association of Health Service

Workers — PPGD) in Semarang in 1917. The PPGD changed its name to *Perhimpunan Zieken Verplegers Bumiputera* (Native Hospital Nurses Association — PZVB) in 1919 and opened a branch in Batavia.[35] However, the union was small and largely inactive, until in the middle of 1924 it was revived by Sarpin, a first-class (male) foreman nurse at the Semarang Municipal Hospital. Under his leadership, branches were quickly established at municipal hospitals in the major Javanese cities.[36] Hospital administrators, mindful of the strength of labour unions in other industries, reacted by pressuring nurses against joining and by tightening controls over nurses' hostels to try to prevent the entry of PZVB propaganda. They went a step further in May 1925 by transferring Sarpin from Semarang to West Borneo in the hope that the union would collapse without his leadership and as a deterrent to others.[37]

These efforts to suppress the union were unsuccessful. By the middle of 1925 it had strong branches in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya, having recruited primarily among male nurses but also among female nurses and to a much lesser extent menial hospital workers. Under its newly acquired nationalist name of *Sarekat Pegawai Rumah Sakit Indonesia* (SPRSI), the union became involved in strikes in Batavia and Semarang, strikes which aroused a good deal of emotion in the European press with charges once again of communist subversion spreading all too rapidly among urban workers.

As in many previous strikes, the catalyst was a relatively minor matter. As an economy measure the hospital management at the Central Municipal Hospital in Batavia replaced chicken with veal on the menu for nurses two days each week in order to bring the menu more into line with the cheaper food served to patients. It was the latest in a series of cost-cutting measures, the most important of which was a reduction in the number of labourers and the requirement that nurses carry out tasks previously done by labourers, such as cleaning rooms, serving food and cleaning trolleys. Transport allowances were also ended, female nurses were required to walk to and from their hostel and promotion opportunities for qualified nurses were made much more difficult.[38] Resentment had been building up for some time among nurses who objected to having to do the menial work of labourers. Nurses were graduates of Second Class Native schools and were conscious of their status in public hospitals, where most of the patients were of lower educational and social backgrounds. In a

clear example of the lack of class solidarity among Indonesian workers, one nurse explained that the basic cause of the strike was the nurses' deep sense of humiliation:

> On top of all these reasons for the strike is the introduction of food identical to that given to the patients, who are poor and of humble origin, which was humiliating to strikers. If there is no longer any difference between nurse and patient then there is also no longer any reason for patients to show respect to nurses. On the contrary, patients will think that nurses are no different from day labourers.[39]

Nurses determined to go hungry for two days each week rather than eat veal and decided at the SPRSI meeting to send a deputation to the Hospital Director. The Director reportedly told the deputation that if they were not happy with the new regulation they could always leave the hospital.[40] A further union meeting on 25 July decided to demonstrate against the Director and over the next two days propaganda was spread around the kampungs where nurses lived as well as in the hospital itself. On the evening of the demonstration, 27 July, a fiery speech by a communist leader persuaded them also to demonstrate against the Head of the Department of Health, Dr van Lonkhuijzen. About a hundred workers, including some women, went to van Lonkhuijzen's house and sat down in front of it, but were ordered away by the police before they had a chance to say anything to him. The following morning ten male nurses were dismissed, followed by five more that evening. All were SPRSI members who had taken part in the demonstration.[41] The next day, 29 July, thirty-six male nurses stayed away from work.

The strikers were given a few hours to return, and when only six did so the remaining thirty were sacked. Police guards were placed at the hospital, and the kampungs where strikers lived were also patrolled. A list of the names of the dismissed nurses was placed prominently at the hospital entrance. After a letter was written to female nurses in the hostel threatening those who continued working, the women were brought to the hospital each day in an ambulance, with the driver accompanied by a policeman. Many of the male nurses who stayed at work were also frightened of retaliation from strikers and they and their families were permitted to live in the hospital grounds until emotions had subsided. The hospital was able to continue as usual, recruiting new student

nurses from the young men who came each day of the strike seeking work. The strikers were not re-employed.[42]

The SPRSI had recruited among both male and female nurses, but only men went on strike and then only sixty of them. The remaining 200 nurses, male and female, continued working.[43] It is difficult to explain why no female nurses joined the strike, except that most of them were young women who lived in the nurses' hostel. Subject to close supervision, it would have been far more difficult for the SPRSI to organize among them and easy for hospital management to pressure them into continuing working. Male nurses lived in the city kampungs and came into daily contact with a wide range of workers, many of whom were members of unions and political parties. They were probably more influenced by the nationalist ideas circulating in the kampungs and were certainly freer to participate in both labour union and nationalist meetings. The hospital management indicated that while a few of the dismissed nurses got jobs in private hospitals — notably five foremen — most returned to their parents.[44] This may be an indication that the strikers were largely young, single men. If so, this would be consistent with strikes in other industries where it was younger men who were the driving force. The younger men, recent graduates from colonial high schools, were deeply influenced by the nationalist movement and far more vocal than their elders in their opposition to the inequities of colonial society.

STRIKES IN SEMARANG

FOR more than a decade there had been a consistent pattern of frequent, small, largely uncoordinated strikes by urban workers interspersed with occasional broader-based strikes in the major cities of Surabaya, Semarang and Batavia. The Java-wide strikes in the railway and pawnshop industries were notable exceptions to this pattern. For over a month in the middle of 1925 Semarang was again the centre of a series of strikes, the blame for which was laid on the communists. A close analysis of the strikes, however, shows that the initiative once more came from workers themselves with communist leaders having only limited roles.

Certainly, Semarang was the major base of the PKI in the middle of 1925. Its headquarters was in that city as were the head offices of the seamen and harbour workers' union (SPPL), the

sugar workers' union (SBG), the printing workers' union (SBT), the engineering workers' union (SBBE) and the railway workers' union (VSTP). Since the end of 1924 PKI leaders had concentrated on organizing among urban wage-earners. At the party's June conference Alimin apparently called for a major strike centred on the railways and harbours and culminating in a general strike.[45] Semarang was the focus of their energies, with much talk of an eventual general strike beginning in that city. The theme of a public meeting on 16 May, for example, was the possibility of a strike of harbour and transport workers in the near future. Speakers recalled the 1923 railway strike and the lessons learned from it, particularly the need to prevent any future strikes being undermined by blacklegs.[46]

While all the significant labour unions in Semarang were communist-led and were organized out of the PKI offices, the sudden rash of strikes in the city in late July and early August cannot simply be attributed to communist plotting. The recession exacerbated long-standing worker unrest which the labour unions took advantage of to build their membership and raise expectations that improvements in wages and conditions were just around the corner. With workers' heightened sense of grievance openly expressed at meetings both large and small, the first outbreak of a strike triggered off an immediate response throughout the city. News of strikes travelled quickly through workplaces and kampungs, encouraging others to action.

The first of the Semarang strikes broke out on 21 July when all fifty-four Indonesian workers employed by a Chinese-owned printing company, publisher of the Malay-Chinese newspaper *Djawa-Tengah*, walked off the job. The day before, they had served a list of demands on the company, including the reinstatement of a compositor dismissed for neglect of duty, a half hour reduction in working hours and a break of one and a half hours on Fridays to enable them to attend the mosque. There was no response from the company, forcing workers to take the matter into their own hands. The same day, 21 July, a strike of thirty-two workers broke out at a second printing company in Semarang, this time because the company refused to reinstate two workers, ostensibly dismissed on the grounds of unsuitability but, in fact, as the company later admitted, dismissed in order to reduce its workforce at a time of slack demand.[47] All strikers were immediately

dismissed and replacement labour, much of it Chinese, recruited from outside Semarang.[48]

The *Sarekat Buruh Tjitak* (SBT) had been active in Semarang for most of the year, at the beginning of June claiming 90 per cent of printing workers in the city as members.[49] It is impossible to verify this claim, but certainly large crowds turned up to SBT meetings in June and July and all accounts agree that the workers who went on strike on 21 July were to a man SBT members. Most had probably taken part in the successful 1919 and 1920 strikes and were convinced that unilateral action would work again.

Once the strike broke out, SBT leaders had no choice but to support it. Indeed, some may have welcomed it as heralding the beginning of the major strike wave talked about by the PKI for some time. On the evening of 22 July the SBT Semarang branch, under the leadership of the PKI member Mardjohan, held a meeting, attended by more than 600 members, which decided to make identical demands on all Semarang printing companies.[50] The demands included: a minimum daily wage of f1, an 8 hour working day, a half day on Saturdays, overtime paid at double time, six months' wages in lieu of notice and agreement that no work would be done at printeries where workers were on strike. Companies were given fourteen days to agree to the demands, failing which a general strike would be called in the Semarang printing industry.[51]

Over the next two weeks the SBT worked hard to organize for a major confrontation with employers. That it gave employers fourteen days to respond to its demands may well indicate not just that it needed time to organize itself, but also that it hoped that companies could be persuaded to negotiate. If so, it was unsuccessful. The general strike in the printing industry was activated. While many workers heeded the call, they were no match for the well-organized employers who recruited labour from elsewhere and, in the case of the larger companies, sent work to their branches in Surabaya or Batavia. In 1919 and 1920 printing companies had been prepared to concede workers' demands because in a buoyant economy they were making large profits and could pass extra costs on to their customers. In 1925 the economy was far from buoyant and most printing companies were over-manned. They could now afford to stand firm, refuse any concessions and recruit enough strike breakers to keep the reduced level of work

flowing. By the end of September when the strike was over they had a much reduced workforce because they re-employed only those workers whose skills were essential to them. The strike achieved the retrenchments they wanted.

A few days before the general strike in the printing industry, workers in the Semarang Central Municipal Hospital walked off the job. Early on the morning of 1 August, around 1.30 a.m., the chief nursing sister at the Semarang Hospital went on her normal rounds but found to her surprise that all Indonesian workers had left their posts and gone home. When the morning shift was due to start, only nineteen of the fifty-eight student nurses and forty-one of the fifty-one foremen nurses turned up and in the kitchen only the chief cook appeared.[52] Those who had deserted their posts during the night were dismissed immediately and the rest given until midday to return to work. When none did, they too were dismissed. The strikers numbered 129: thirty-six male nurses, twenty-one female student nurses, two female nurses, twelve foremen male nurses, eight kitchen hands, sixteen washmen and ten labourers at the main hospital together with twenty labourers and four foremen at an annex.[53]

For some months the SPRSI had been organizing among workers at the central hospitals in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya. Conditions in the major hospitals were similar and grievances seen in Batavia were also present in Semarang and Surabaya. Apart from common grievances over wages, Indonesian workers at the Semarang Central Municipal Hospital had recently been complaining about harsh and arbitrary treatment from European supervisors.[54] The rumblings of discontent became louder in late July after the Semarang hospital dismissed two foremen nurses for troublemaking. Both were union organizers. The SPRSI convened a meeting of Semarang hospital workers on 21 July which demanded that the hospital reinstate the two foremen nurses.[55] The demands were ignored. It is significant that the only wage demand made was for foremen, indicating that it was foremen who were making the running in the union.

The SPRSI organized kampung meetings to explain the action of their fellow hospital workers in Batavia and to raise money for them. Strong attacks were made on hospital managers and workers were urged to defend their own interests. Many hospital workers would have listened to the urgings of union leaders — particularly if they were respected kampung leaders who were

foremen in the hospital — and talked among themselves about the strike in Batavia. They would also have been aware of the strike in the two printing companies. Many would have been in regular contact with printing workers in the city kampungs and no doubt the looming general strike in the printing industry encouraged them to assert themselves in their workplace.

The catalyst for action seems to have been the arrest on 31 July of three SPRSI leaders (a PKI propagandist, a foreman male nurse and a student nurse) for using threatening words to female nurses.[56] They may well have been aware that female nurses were continuing working through the strike in Batavia and been determined to prevent this happening in Semarang. News of the arrests would have spread quickly through the hospital and the kampungs. The sudden strike was well coordinated, indicating that night shift workers had either discussed the issue before starting work or been organized during the evening. Union leaders may have been active that afternoon and evening in the kampungs, but within the hospital itself the initiative lay with the workers.

The strike at Semarang was no more successful than that at Batavia. While 129 workers had gone on strike, most workers stayed on the job, protected by police when travelling to and from work. There was little worker solidarity despite the union's efforts to make them conscious of the need to stand united if improvements in wages and conditions were to be achieved. Ethnic differences within the workforce seem to have played a part in this lack of solidarity: the ten Javanese foremen male nurses went on strike but the forty-one Bataks stayed on the job.[57] With most workers continuing work the hospital stayed open. The major difficulty seems to have been that all the kitchen and laundry workers joined the strike, but this problem was solved by the use of forced labour from the local jail.[58] Faced with lack of unity in its own ranks and the hospital's ability to obtain forced labour, the SPRSI had no chance of forcing concessions. The strike petered out. Many of the strikers were refused re-employment, though the hospital took back some of the more skilled workers whom it would have had difficulty in replacing.

Within a few days of Semarang hospital workers going on strike a more serious dispute broke out in the Semarang harbour. Semarang harbour workers had been on strike in 1913, 1918 and 1921, and each time they had forced concessions from employers. Seamen and wharf labourers had taken direct action in order to

improve their lot in life. However, attempts in 1919 to organize them into the *Havenarbeidersbond* had little success.

By 1924 there were independent but ineffective unions for harbour workers at all of the major ports in Java. Harbour workers were an independent lot, held in strong vertical ties to their patrons and employers, the foremen and helmsmen. The latter seem to have been suspicious of outsiders trying to muscle in on their territory and few joined the unions. With foremen and helmsmen staying aloof, ordinary seamen and labourers also showed little interest in the unions. Meanwhile, exiled in the Netherlands since August 1923, Semaun had begun to organize Indonesian sailors working on the ships which plied the Netherlands-Indies trade. Together with Iwa Kusumasumantri, a young law student active in the Indonesian student organization Perhimpunan Indonesia, Semaun formed the *Sarekat Pegawai Laut Indonesia* (SPLI) in February 1924. The SPLI tried to negotiate improved wages and conditions for sailors but the shipping companies ignored these requests. It was much more difficult to prevent SPLI pamphlets and letters circulating among Indonesian sailors, and the union took advantage of the low pay and conditions of sailors to build up its membership.[59]

It had probably always been Semaun's intention that his Amsterdam-based SPLI should link up with seamen and harbour workers' unions in Indonesia itself. In December 1924 PKI leaders went from Semarang to Surabaya for discussions with leaders of the existing unions for harbour workers with the intention of forming them into one Java-wide union. The party's recently concluded Yogyakarta congress had confirmed its strategy of concentrating on urban areas, with harbour workers and sailors prime targets for unionization. It was hoped that at some future date they could be organized with a strengthened VSTP into a general transport strike which would cripple the colony's commerce. A pamphlet was spread in Surabaya harbour workers' kampungs on 20 December announcing a meeting the following day to form a new union of seamen and harbour workers which would form a united front against '. . .capitalist and imperialist oppression'. About 1,500 people attended the meeting in a local cinema at which the *Sarekat Pegawai Pelabuhan dan Lautan* (SPPL) was born.[60]

The SPPL was increasingly visible in the major port-cities in 1925, with public meetings, propaganda among workers and veiled

threats to government and employers that if wages and conditions were not improved then a general strike would soon break out in the harbours. The threats were taken seriously by the government: the harbours were as vital as the railways to the colony's export trade and commercial life. In 1921, fearing a major strike in the railways, contingency plans had been drawn up to keep the railways operating. In 1925 arrangments were made with the police and harbour authorities to ensure the defeat of any harbour strike. Superintendents of jails in Surabaya, Makasar, Padang and Cipinang (near Batavia) were asked to be ready to send prisoners to the major harbours if called upon. Discussions were held between the Department of Justice and KPM, the major shipping company, to house and feed prisoners if they were used as strike breakers and the army was alerted to protect the harbour precincts.[61]

It is difficult to assess accurately how many people joined the SPPL. Union leaders made exaggerated claims and figures supplied by Semaun or Comintern sources are also dubious, not least because they did not distinguish between membership of the SPPL in Indonesia and membership of the SPLI in the Netherlands.[62] Rarely did branch leadership come from within harbour workers' communities, which greatly limited SPPL numbers and was a barrier to those who did join becoming more than nominal members. One case of active hostility towards the SPPL was reported in the middle of 1925 from Cilacap, on the south coast of Java. A small union had organized among Cilacap harbour workers between 1919 and 1923 but since then had been moribund. In the middle of 1925 some of its former executive members met with a foreman and a head of the labourers in order to try to counter the communist-led SPPL by reactivating the earlier union. One of the first actions of the revived union was to ask employers to give a wage rise only to workers who had not joined the SPPL. There is no record of employers' response.[63]

At Tegal, on the north coast of Java near Semarang, the manager of the local Steam and Sail Boat Company adopted a similar tactic himself in September 1925. By only giving influential workers a wage rise, he hoped to persuade them against joining the SPPL. The SPPL, however, countered by organizing a deputation of 100 members who demanded of the manager a wage rise for all workers, threatening to strike if this was refused. Anxious to avoid a strike the manager gave way.[64] The Tegal branch of the SPPL was small but very active in the latter half of 1925. It was led

by men who had been sent by the SPPL in Semarang for that purpose. Indeed, at the end of 1925 the chairman of the Sarekat Rakjat, the SPPL and the SBT at Tegal were all PKI men who had recently come from outside the town. All resided in the local Sarekat Rakjat office.[65] Where the SPPL did attract influential or skilled harbour workers to leadership positions it was not long before employers found out and pressured them to resign. In Surabaya, for example, a draughtsman in the harbour became secretary of the SPPL there, but when this came to the attention of the harbour management he was given one day to resign as secretary or lose his job.[66] When employers and government repeatedly argued that labour unions were not really representative of workers because they were led by outsiders, political and union leaders rightly retorted that employer retribution gave them no choice.

After many false reports of an impending general strike in the Java harbours, a strike did break out in the Semarang harbour on 4 August 1925. The government and the Dutch-language press was quick to focus on the communist leadership of the SPPL as proof that yet again simple workers had been misled by communist agitators. Concentration on the undeniable fact that SPPL leaders were members of the PKI blinded both government and employers to the economic grievances which were the real cause of harbour workers going on strike. This is not to deny the impact that SPPL propaganda might have had on harbour workers or indeed the influence on harbour workers of the current wave of strikes in Semarang. Rather it is to argue that the organization of the strike was little different from previous strikes in Semarang and Surabaya, in that the initiative came from below and union leaders only became involved after the event. The SPPL in Semarang had been agitating for some time over the dismissal of three workers for no other reason, it asserted, than that they had been spreading SPPL propaganda in the harbour.[67] There was no response to this issue from harbour workers. Workers were far more concerned about their wages and it was this issue that sparked off a strike on 4 August.

The strike was over by the end of August, with the company victorious. Late in August the company let it be known that it was prepared to re-employ strikers on the old conditions, and government officials were sent into strikers' villages with this information together with promises of protection if strikers returned. Most of the sailors did return, but many of the helmsmen were not re-

employed. They were rightly seen by the company as the key men in organizing seamen's demands for improvements in their lot. The decision not to re-employ many of them was seen not only as removing troublemakers but also acting as a deterrent to other helmsmen. Many of the sacked helmsmen got work as day labourers in the harbour warehouses, employed by sympathetic foremen with the acquiescence of company managements. It was reported that they worked hard at their labouring tasks, cherishing the hope that one day they would be re-employed in their old jobs.[68] Others merely hung around the harbour precincts in a vain search for work, until moved on by the police.[69]

The company took two further measures to try to prevent future strikes. Firstly, it retained in its employment forty-four men brought from Bangka during the strike as — in the words of the Resident of Semarang — 'a reliable core', in case of future trouble. Secondly, it decided in future to pay the seamen directly instead of through their helmsmen. In this way it hoped to break the bonds between sailors and helmsmen and thereby reduce the power of the helmsmen.[70] In its Annual Report for 1925 the Company acknowledged that some of its workers' grievances were reasonable and, indeed, it had attended to them once the strike was over. It was important, though, to take a strong stand against strikers who were led by communists and it warned that similar tough action would be taken in any future strike.[71]

Strikes in the harbours, the printing industry and the central hospital had focused government attention on Semarang for more than a month. The major strikes were over by the end of September, but a number of small-scale strikes continued to break out through to the end of the year. One of the more unusual was among workers employed by the Singer Sewing Machine Company. The pedal-driven Singer sewing machines were as popular in Java in the 1910s and 1920s as elsewhere in the world. Relatively cheap, solidly built and easy to maintain, they revolutionized small tailoring businesses and cottage garment manufacturing. Those who worked for the Singer Company in Java were commissioned agents, making sales on hire purchase and collecting payments each week from their customers. For this they received a small travelling allowance to cover tram fares and a commission of 8 per cent on moneys collected and sales made. Agents were supervised by chief agents who recruited their own agents from whom they received a weekly commission on top of their wage from the company.[72]

One of the chief agents had organized Singer workers into a union, the *Sarekat Buruh Singer Indonesia* (SBSI), which by the middle of 1925 had small branches in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya and probably elsewhere also.[73] On 29 July all thirty-six agents in Semarang went on strike after the Singer Company refused a union demand for an increase in commission to 10 per cent, an increased transport allowance and the re-employment of a dismissed agent. Within a few days about half of the strikers had returned, probably under pressure from their patrons, the chief agents, but many others held out until mid-October when they seem to have been forced to concede defeat.[74] The company responded to the formation of the SBSI by dividing chief agents from agents, employing the simple but effective tactic of raising the wages of the chief agents.[75] When the agents went on strike it was able to count on its chief agents' support in collecting payments on time. This small, relatively insignificant, strike again illustrates all too clearly the divisions within the wage labour force and how the structures by which labour was recruited and paid enabled employers to divide worker against worker to their own advantage.

The Semarang strikes drew a sharp reaction from the European press, which since the railway strike had noticeably hardened its attitude to labour union activity. The reactionary *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, voice of the sugar industry, predictably called for stronger government action against communist-inspired labour unions and in particular called for the banning of all communist newspapers.[76] It was joined by the *Java Bode* which argued that because most natives were illiterate it was most important to stop all open and closed meetings by unions and communist groups.[77] The pressure mounted on the government to take even tougher action against unions led by communists, despite the criticism of the more sympathetic *Indische Courant* that Europeans were too quick to ascribe strikes such as the one in the Batavia hospital to communists:

> People repeat the story of a communist danger. Everything is communism. People particularly see 'actions of communists'. In this way every movement emerging from employees is deprived of the right of existence.[78]

The government responded to this strike on 5 August by banning public meetings in Semarang without prior permission

from the Resident. A day earlier PKI leaders in Semarang had gathered to discuss the mounting labour unrest and had decided to try to convert it into a general strike in the city. Their intentions were doubtless known by the Semarang police almost as soon as they were made, but it seems to have been coincidental that the ban on public meetings was imposed the following day. The government need not have worried, for the PKI leaders' decision was one of hope rather than the implementation of a carefully worked out plan.[79] The ban did not prevent strikers meeting in small groups in the kampungs, at food stalls or on the banks of canals.[80] It was, however, a fatal blow to the hopes of some PKI leaders that they might be able to channel worker unrest into a major campaign against the colonial government.

Unions in other cities rallied to the support of the Semarang strikers. Employers and government were denounced at public rallies, small amounts of money were collected and workers were urged not to allow themselves to be used as strike breakers. The VSTP Cirebon executive, for example, wrote an impassioned plea to its colleagues in Prupuk:

> Brothers, as you will already know, a strike has broken out in Semarang. Employees of the sail boat companies, the steamship companies, the hospital, from workplaces, printeries and police are striking in order to gain improvements in their lot and in order to end arbitrary treatment. Thousands of employees have left work and taken a stand against the oppression and arbitrary treatment of employers. You, brothers, most certainly already understand that this resistance by Semarang workers is just the same as resistance by workers here, because the victory of Semarang workers will also be the victory of workers here. Semarang workers must defeat the oppression and arbitrary treatment of employers and struggle for an improvement in their lot in life. That is the reason the resistance of our brother workers at Semarang must be supported, so that a victory can be won there. Brothers, help, show your humanity, so that workers who are struggling over there become strong; help the lives of their wives and children through your charitableness.[81]

SURABAYA STRIKES

THE ban on holding meetings in Semarang reduced union activity there to little more than a holding operation. Many Semarang workers who had gone on strike found that they had no jobs to go back to, while others returned on terms less favourable than

before the strike. Their defeat, though, did not deter workers in Surabaya from trying to force improvements in their wages and conditions. From September until the end of the year a series of strikes broke out in that city, particularly in the engineering industries.

The active labour unions in Surabaya, as elsewhere by this time, were under communist leadership. The Surabaya headquarters of the PKI was also the office for, among others, the *Sarekat Postel*, the SPPL, the *Federatie Sarekat Bengkil Buruh Electrische*, *Sarekat Buruh Gula*, *Sarekat Buruh Marine Etablissement* and the Surabaya branch of the VSTP. After the failure of the Semarang strikes and the ban on public meetings in that city, a number of communists prominent in Semarang labour unions moved to Surabaya to add to the leadership of unions there.[82]

Overall membership of labour unions in Surabaya was not large. At the end of 1925 it was estimated that the VSTP had 900 members in Surabaya, the Sarekat Postel 450, the SPPL 1,500 and the *Sarekat Bengkil Buruh Electrische* (SBBE) 2,000.[83] A closer analysis of SPPL membership shows that it was more successful in recruiting workers at the Naval Base, where it had 700 members, and the Dry Dock, where it had 400 members, than among harbour workers, where it had only 250 members.[84] The predominantly Madurese harbour workers were no more prepared to join the SPPL in 1925 than they had been to join earlier unions. These Madurese workers had close ties to the foremen who employed them and the foremen generally stayed aloof from the union. The fact that the SPPL was controlled by Javanese may have been a major barrier. The other large union, the SBBE, was formed in October 1925 as a federation of the *Sarekat Buruh Bengkil* (SBB) and the *Sarekat Buruh Electrische* (SBE), both of which had been established in Surabaya in January that year. By the middle of the year the SBE was holding course meetings twice a week and the SBB almost nightly, attended on average by about fifty men, as they actively sought to recruit workers in the engineering factories.[85]

The chairmen of Surabaya labour unions were all prominent PKI leaders, without exception earning their living as union officials. The composition of the executives, though, had little changed from previous years, consisting predominantly of skilled workers in the particular industry. For example, while the chairman of the *Sarekat Pegawai Rumah Sakit Indonesia* was a profes-

sional union official and PKI leader, all other positions on the executive were held by male foremen nurses at the Central Municipal Hospital. The situation in the SPPL was similar, with the chairman and vice-chairman professional union officials and PKI leaders but the secretary, a deputy supervisor, the treasurer a foreman and the commissioner a draughtsman in the harbour. The *Sarekat Postel* was the only union which differed from this pattern, with all of its Surabaya executive employed by the Post and Telegraph Service. Its chairman was a clerk at the Surabaya Central Telephone Office and all other members were assistant postal clerks.[86]

A major strike broke out at the Van Dorp printery on 1 September. For at least a month the *Sarekat Buruh Tjitak* had been campaigning hard among printing workers in Surabaya, arguing that they were badly treated and exploited and urging them to improve their conditions by joining the union. The strike by printing workers in Semarang and Batavia was reported in detail and money collected in support of strikers and their families.[87] When the Van Dorp Company switched work from its strike-affected Semarang works to Surabaya, workers there saw a chance to force improvements in wages and conditions from the company. In 1923 they had won wage increases of around 23 per cent together with an increase in bonuses from 10 per cent to 20 per cent, but as the recession hit the printing industry in 1924 these improvements were gradually withdrawn. Workers were unhappy with their treatment and seized the chance offered by the strike in the Van Dorp Semarang works to try to force reinstatement of these increases.

The Van Dorp workers in Surabaya did not wait for their union, the SBT, to act but summed up the situation themselves and made their own demands on the company, under threat of a strike if they were not agreed to. The demands included a restoration of wages to 1924 levels, payment of six weeks' wages on retrenchment and free medical treatment and medicines when sick. The Van Dorp management responded by offering merely to review wages with effect from 1 January 1926 and pay two weeks' wages on retrenchment of workers with more than one year's service or one week's wages for those with less than one year's service. On 1 September not one of the 167 Indonesian workers turned up for work. They were well organized by the skilled workers who led the campaign and doubtless pressured waverers

to join. The strike lasted over two months, with Van Dorp refusing yet again to concede any of the demands and indeed removing the diligence bonus of 10 per cent for those whom it re-employed. Van Dorp was a tough company, as it had demonstrated many times before. Of the 167 workers employed before the strike, only 40 per cent were re-employed. Of the eighty-eight strikers who sought re-employment, twenty-three were rejected.[88] It is difficult to understand what happened to the seventy-nine strikers who did not seek re-employment. Most were skilled workers who normally could easily have found work elsewhere in the industry. In late 1925, however, few printing companies were recruiting extra hands. Like the thousands of railway workers who did not try to get their jobs back after the 1923 strike, they may have sought different work in Surabaya or left the city to seek work elsewhere.

Van Dorp workers had gone on strike on their own initiative and only afterwards was the union involved. The same pattern was evident at the Surabaya engineering company, Nederlandsch-Indie Industrie, early in October. The *Sarekat Buruh Bengkil* had stepped up its activities in Surabaya since August and had recruited members in most of the major engineering companies, concentrating on skilled workers and foremen. Recruitment was aided by the price increases in basic goods in recent months at a time when workers' wages had declined significantly since the gains of 1920 and 1921.

On 5 October a 17 year-old draughtsman named Marmin was sacked by the Nederlandsch-Indie Industrie because he had spread union propaganda in the factory. Immediately, fellow draughtsmen demanded his re-instatement and supported their demands by walking out. Nineteen men were involved. Marmin was a new employee, a recent graduate of the Surabaya Trade School, who was also the treasurer of the Surabaya branch of the *Sarekat Buruh Bengkil*. That night a hurried meeting of workers decided to extend the strike. The following day, 6 October, an old and respected workman in the boiler-making section of the company asked again that Marmin be reinstated. When this second request was refused, seventy out of the 100 boiler-makers downed tools and went on strike.[89]

The immediate cause of the dispute was workers' sense of unfair treatment of Marmin, but once the strike broke out the SBB stepped in to broaden it. The SBB executive wrote to the company

threatening a factory-wide strike on Monday 12 October unless its demands were met by the previous Saturday. A strike was more likely to get widespread support after the men were paid their fortnightly wages on the Saturday. The SBB demands included: reinstatement of Marmin and payment for the days he had not been able to work; re-employment of all strikers and payment for the days not worked; payment to each worker of his share of the f18,000 Pension and Death Benefit Fund; daily wages to replace hourly wages, with a five and a half day working week but payment of seven days' wages if a full week was worked; penalty rates for work on Sunday and holidays and, finally, three weeks wages in lieu of notice if a worker was sacked through no fault of his own.

The company had a full order book and was concerned to avoid penalties from its customers for late delivery. When the Saturday deadline arrived it agreed to re-employ Marmin, though in a different section of the company, as well as re-employ all other strikers with payment for the time on strike. It agreed also to pay out half the Pension and Death Benefits Fund and promised a bonus to workers who worked a full six day week. While not meeting union wage demands — an effective 30 per cent increase — this was enough for the strikers. On 12 October, after having been on strike for one week, workers returned to their jobs.[90]

The government inquiry into the Surabaya strikes argued that, in retrospect, the concessions made by the Nederlandsch-Indie Industrie were a major mistake:

> The consequences were disastrous, however. It was interpreted as a complete success for the *Sarekat Buruh Bengkil*: the simple *tukang* believed that the organization had become powerful and great numbers of them joined the SBB after its success[91].

The report ignored, however, the real causes of the strike. Workers had general complaints about stagnant wages at a time when prices were rising as well as specific complaints about unfair treatment and fear about the safety of money in the Pension and Death Benefits Fund, which was made up of deductions from their wages together with equal contributions from the company. These latter fears were justified. The company had improperly used some of the Fund money, only returning it after loud protests when its workers found out.

Over the next two months leaders of the new SBBE Federation worked hard to expand union membership in Surabaya engineering companies, as well as to extend its influence outside that city. Central and branch executives were closely linked to the PKI and the union shared office space with the party. The chairman of the central executive was Sukindar, a European Lower School graduate and a former editor of the PKI newspaper *Sinar Hindia* in Semarang before he moved to Surabaya. He was not a PKI member but was active in unions close to the PKI, such as the sugar factory workers union *Sarekat Buruh Gula*. The treasurer was Supeno, a clerk at the Nederlandsch-Indie Industrie at Surabaya, who had at one time been secretary/treasurer of the Surabaya branch of the PKI before resigning from the party in March 1924 after he took a government job.[92] Chairman of the Surabaya branch was Prawirosardjono, a PKI member and former clerk in a Surabaya engineering company before becoming a full-time union official. He was also chairman of the Surabaya branch of the seamen and harbour workers union, the SPPL, as well as active in other Surabaya unions.[93]

The SBBE took full advantage of the victory over the Nederlandsch-Indie Industrie and no doubt many workers were impressed by this. By the end of November the union claimed a city-wide membership of 2,559, or about 30 per cent of the total Indonesian workforce in the industry.[94] The figures may be exaggerated, but even the Indies government estimated its Surabaya membership at around 2,000.

Why did so many workers flock to the SBBE in these two months? It will be remembered that five years earlier Jahya had achieved similar results in just a few months. Many of his followers came from the engineering factories — indeed it is quite likely that many of the same men who followed Jahya in 1920 rushed to the SBBE in 1925. The memory of the strikes and lock-outs of 1920 would have lived on, but the personal experience of financial hurt may have faded. Five more years of nationalist activity in the kampungs and the ever-present reality of depressed wages and conditions may have persuaded many workers that the risks were worth taking again.

Little had changed in labour relations in Surabaya since Jahya's abortive attempt to organize workers. If anything the relationship between European supervisors and Indonesian workers had deteriorated further, as was tacitly admitted by the government

inquiry into the 1925 strikes. Its report argued that 'The crude tone and possible physical violence in the workplaces should be countered systematically'.[95] Clearly, there were still deep-seated grievances among sections of the Surabaya workforce. They had generally lacked the outside leadership provided Semarang workers since the mid 1910s, but on the two occasions it was offered they showed that they were willing to pay out their money and join a union. The limited evidence suggests that the great majority of SBBE members were skilled tradesmen. Indeed, many of the staunchest union activists on the factory floors were young graduates of the Surabaya Trade School, men who were too young to have personally experienced the 1920 strike. While they were able to galvanize other skilled workers to action they obtained a far less enthusiastic response from factory foremen. Foremen may have remembered more clearly the failure of 1920 and, more importantly, resented the threat these brash young men posed to their status and power in the workplaces. Many did join the SBBE, but seem to have only reluctantly involved themselves in the move towards strike action. This was to be a crucial weakness in workers' ability to sustain their strikes.

Support for the SBBE was two-edged, as it had been for Jahya in 1920. Union propaganda struck a responsive chord in the factories: it focused on the deterioration in wages and conditions and argued that workers could only obtain justice through collective action. The SBBE expanded quickly because workers believed that it would provide immediate redress of their grievances. Membership of the union made them more confident in asserting their rights in the factories. The initiative for direct action lay with workers themselves, and SBBE leaders were as aware as Jahya had been in 1920 that, much as they might wish to control local militants until strike plans could be carefully organized, in the end, if they wanted to retain worker support, they had no choice but to support unilateral action.

Were SBBE leaders in Surabaya seeking a major strike at the end of 1925? Throughout the year many communist union leaders had cherished the vision of a general strike in the colony some time in the near future. But there were no concrete plans and even after a number of Semarang communists moved to Surabaya in August the talk in PKI circles still referred only vaguely to a possible general strike in the transport industry during the approaching sugar milling season, possibly in May 1926. The union reportedly

had a mere f350 in its strike fund and its leaders were well aware both of the fragility of the organization and the ephemeral nature of much of its support.[96] At the beginning of November, a local newspaper, *Kemadjoean Hindia*, interviewed SPPL executive members about reports in the European press that a strike was about to break out in the Surabaya harbour under their leadership. The executive members stated firmly that they did not believe the time was ripe for a strike and, indeed, had rejected proposals from groups of workers in three companies for a general strike because of arbitrary treatment by employers.[97] Prawirosardjono was chairman of the Surabaya SBBE as well as of the SPPL. Both he and Sukindar, chairman of the SBBE central executive, were later reported as disagreeing with the strike by workers in the engineering companies because the union was not yet well enough organized to ensure its success.[98] The dilemma for the communist union leaders, however, was that while they might wish to avoid a precipitate confrontation with employers and government, their unions had raised workers' expectations of short-term gains and had created an atmosphere in workshops and factories where something dramatic was expected to happen at any time.

Unilateral action in the Braat Engineering Company in the middle of November became the catalyst for a major confrontation between management and labour over the next two months. On 19 November a worker named Lan in the instrument-making section was dismissed as unsuitable. The dismissal angered fellow workers and on 23 November they demanded that Lan be re-employed before they would start work. This was refused, whereupon seventy men immediately left the factory. All but ten of them were members of the SBBE. During the morning, as news of the strike filtered through the workplaces, another 240 workers downed tools and went home.

Workers responded to perceived injustice by walking off the job, as they had so many times before. It was only at this stage that the SBBE became directly involved. During the morning of 23 November, Prawirosardjono, chairman of the SBBE, sent a letter to the manager of the Braat Company. His letter demanded the reinstatement of Lan, with payment of wages for the time not worked, the reinstatement of all strikers with payment for the time on strike, the reimbursement of the company Savings Fund to workers and, finally, acknowledgement of the SBBE as workers' representative. Shortly after the letter was delivered, just before

midday, a deputation of foremen asked the manager to pay out the Savings Fund immediately. Workers contributed 10 per cent of their wages to the Savings Fund, which was paid out at Lebaran. The foremen's request was refused: the Braat manager would have been well aware that with cash in their pockets workers could strike for a long time. The foremen went away empty-handed, but after the midday meal break, which gave them a chance to talk to workers, some 500 men did not return to their jobs.[99] The foremen themselves, however, stayed on the job that afternoon, perhaps unsure as to whether they should side with their workers or with their employer.

The following day, 24 November, almost the entire Indonesian workforce of 800 men was on strike, including all but two of the foremen, doubtless after long and perhaps heated debates in the kampungs overnight. On the night of 22 November a company representative went around foremen's houses demanding that they use their influence to get workers back or else recruit new workers. The foremen refused to cooperate, responding instead that they too were on strike. Earlier efforts that morning by the company to talk a group of thirty strikers walking up and down outside the factory into returning also failed. The PKI newspaper *Api* delightedly reported that when a European manager asked these strikers why they were walking up and down the street he was told: 'To eat rice and drink coffee, sir, but we do not dare to work because workers at this factory have gone on strike', after which the strikers walked away. The answer may indicate some reluctance to be on strike, but the strength of communal ties prevented them breaking ranks. This *Api* sense of triumph soon faded, however, as the two foremen remaining at work quickly recruited enough new labour to keep the factory operating at half power.[100]

The SBBE now took over the running of the strike. Its first move was to widen it by serving identical demands on all of the major engineering companies in Surabaya as well as on the Dry Dock Company. The demands included the replacement of hourly wages with daily wages, the introduction of an 8 hour day with provision for overtime, wage increases of 50 per cent for those earning less than f1 per day and 25 per cent for those earning more, and acknowledgement of the SBBE as the workers' representative.[101]

The Surabaya Association of Engineering Companies was a loose employers' organization only too well aware of the keen

rivalry between member companies. This time it determined to stand firm, with no repeat of the concessions made by the Nederlandsch-Indie Industrie. On 2 December it decided that:

1. No company would, either directly or indirectly, have contact with the communist SBBE or other communist tinted organization nor with any person who did not belong to their native workforce who claimed to speak on their behalf.
2. None of them would reply to any collective demands made by workers but would send them to a commission appointed by the Association and would abide by its decision.
3. Any company affected by a strike would be assisted by all other companies.

This last decision involved an undertaking that during a strike at one factory no other company would employ strikers. During previous strikes unaffected companies had quietly seized their chance to recruit additional skilled labour by employing striking artisans. The intention in 1925 was to force strikers to return to their original employers. A sub-committee was empowered to ensure that members abided by the common decision.[102] Privately, the chairman of the Employers Association was far from convinced that members would hold firm to this agreement if the strike lasted for any length of time. A long strike could mean the financial ruin of some companies and in the final analysis they would put their own interests first. It was important, then, that the strike be crushed swiftly before the cracks in employers' resolve became apparent.[103]

The SBBE had threatened a general strike unless it received favourable responses to its letters by Wednesday 9 December. In the meantime, it organized nightly meetings in the Surabaya kampungs. Workers were urged to support their union, as a strike was the only way in which they could get better conditions. The strike broke out on Monday 14 December. It was delayed five days until workers had been paid on the Saturday. With money in their pockets workers were more likely to support a strike.

On the Saturday the message was whispered around the workplaces that the strike would begin on Monday.[104] The call was repeated Saturday night and through Sunday as union activists went around Surabaya kampungs urging solidarity and boosting morale. Government and European newspaper reports suggested that intimidation and threats of violence were rampant. It was reported that a foreman at the Polygram Company told his manager

on the Saturday that while he wanted to continue working he was afraid of the strikers. He had armed himself with a large knife.[105] It would be surprising if there was not some intimidation but its extent was greatly exaggerated.

The strong sense of community in the kampungs was the key factor in the wide response to the strike call. The social and economic issues causing worker discontent would have been frequent topics of conversation. Over the past two or three months regular SBBE meetings had been held in the kampungs at which grievances were focused and younger skilled workers, in particular, urged strike action. Gradually a consensus was reached that they would strike, with those who opposed this action agreeing, however reluctantly, to abide by the majority decision. One of the government officials who investigated the strike reported that he had spoken to a kampung headman, an old artisan at one of the large engineering companies, and asked him why he had gone on strike. The headman replied that, although the strike was against his better judgement, nevertheless:

> We do what the majority want to do; if it is decided to strike then I strike, and if it is decided to return to work then I return. If one does not do this then one encounters nothing but trouble.[106]

Support for the strike varied from factory to factory, but in the seven major companies targeted by the SBBE almost the entire Indonesian workforce of just over 3,500 went on strike. At most companies foremen as well as artisans and unskilled workers stayed away, but at one factory the foremen stayed on the job.[107] A huge public meeting was held in a city cinema on Sunday 20 December, at which an estimated 3,000 people were urged to stand firm. The following day most of the permanent Indonesian workforce at the Dry Dock Company joined the strike, though Chinese workers and many of the unskilled day-wage labour force of some 130 continued working.[108] The skilled artisans were confident of victory. When strikers from the Braat Company were confronted by local police on 16 December they spoke defiantly of employers having to concede quickly because their work was too difficult for others to do. Their confidence was bolstered by information leaked by company clerks that some sugar factories were already inquiring whether their orders would be completed on time.[109] While some were confident that the skilled labour shortage would get them a

quick victory, others placed their faith in talismans. Many foremen from the Dry Dock Company were reported to have bought talismans from a prominent local *kiyayi* who promised that their possession would lead to victory.[110]

Although after one week strikers were belatedly joined by workers from the Dry Dock, the strike was in fact beginning to collapse. Foremen began to trickle back in the last few days before the Christmas break and by the end of December most had returned. Only at two factories, Braat, where the strike had begun, and Polygram, did large numbers of workers refuse to concede defeat. At the Braat Company on 9 January only 46 per cent of the total workforce were old workers; the rest were recruited after the strike began. At the Polygram Company only ninety-one out of the total workforce of 205 returned by 31 December, the rest sought work elsewhere.[111]

Employers and government placed strikers under tremendous pressure. On 26 November a ban on public meetings was applied to the PKI, the Sarekat Rakjat, the SBB and the SBG in the Surabaya Residency.[112] Over the next few weeks some seventy-three union and PKI leaders were arrested and placed in preventive detention, thereby denying leadership to strikers.[113] Surabaya police were placed on full alert and armed police were brought in from outside. Police guards were placed on factories and public buildings and armed patrols ostentatiously made of strikers' kampungs. Those willing to work were shepherded to and from their homes by armed police and guards were placed outside their homes at night. Key workers and kampung leaders — foremen and older skilled workers — were pressured by police, employers and government officials to end their strike and persuade others to return as well.

It was easy for companies to recruit unskilled strike breakers but very difficult to find replacement artisans immediately. The Braat Company brought a number of artisans from Yogyakarta on 27 November, but these men refused to continue working as soon as they found out they were being used as strike breakers.[114] Clearly, strikers were convinced that they would achieve a speedy victory and were unprepared for a long period without money. Some did manage to get work in sugar factories in the Surabaya region — despite promises by the sugar industry not to employ strikers — but most were very quickly desperate for money.[115] Deprived of union leadership, aware of activists being jailed and

intimidated by armed police, workers soon lost heart. Many foremen returned after one week and probably spent much of their time in the second week talking to strikers in the kampungs about the looming failure of the strike. Meetings and discussions were a nightly occurrence in the kampungs. Just as a collective decision had been made to strike, with the unwilling prepared to go along with the majority, so a collective decision seems to have been made to return. When the factories opened their gates after the Christmas break, absenteeism was little higher than normal.[116]

Employers had won a major victory and in the process destroyed the SBBE. Workers abandoned the union as quickly as they had earlier embraced it. Its credibility was destroyed: its leaders were in jail, its meetings were banned and many factory-level activists had been sacked. It had proved unable either to force redress of their grievances or protect them against government and employer retribution. For older workers the experience would have reinforced their experience of 1920 and for younger men it was a sharp reminder of the realities of power in the colony.

The official report into the strikes, while recognizing that there was considerable room for improvement in wages, conditions and the general treatment of workers, nevertheless was in no doubt at all:

> . . . that the atmosphere before the strike in Surabaya was wholly created by communist action, and also that this communist action — and not a single economic fact — was the immediate cause of the incidents which again through communist action resulted in a strike; that the strike was created by the communists and was led solely by communists and that it failed because of government measures taken in the interests of tranquillity and order.[117]

The government-appointed inquiry produced conservative conclusions, as might be expected, but in the process prepared a valuable document on the social and economic conditions of workers in the Surabaya engineering industry. Parallel to the official inquiry the Indonesian Study Club launched its own investigation of the strikes. The Indonesian Study Club was founded in Surabaya in July 1924 under the leadership of Sutomo, a Netherlands-educated doctor, and was attracting increasing numbers of Indonesian intellectuals in Surabaya.[118] It was still little more than a debating group, but its interest in the Surabaya strikes

foreshadowed a steady move over the next few years into more active involvement in the social, economic and political fields. The conclusions of its report were in stark contrast to those of the official inquiry, for it argued that there were indeed economic grievances behind the strikes and, equally importantly, that workers were aggrieved at their constant arbitrary treatment by European managers. It did not dispute the government claim that most Surabaya union leaders were communists, but argued that in its discussions with them they had all stressed that they were only trying to realize the wishes of the workers. This it accepted, arguing, moreover, that:

> It was difficult, and still is now, for the leadership to be given to other than communists, because anyone who sets himself up as the head of an organization or as a leader at this time is immediately regarded and treated as a communist.

It cautioned against government and employers believing that labour conflicts were ended by the suppression of the strike. On the contrary, it argued that conflict would continue as long as the basic social and economic grievances of workers were not resolved. It believed that the creation of a labour inspectorate on Java was crucial to improved labour relations. Moreover, it cautioned the government against being too heavy-handed against unions, arguing that government support of healthy labour unions together with the end of bans on meetings were basic conditions for peace and order in industry. It feared that a lack of organization and leadership for urban workers could lead to assaults on employers and on Europeans generally in the future as workers became frustrated at their condition. Employers must improve the social conditions of workers, with better housing, medical care insurance and closer regulation of hours and conditions of work. Reinforcing the argument of the official inquiry, it emphasized that it was essential for Europeans who worked directly with Indonesians to have some command of their language.[119]

Both the official inquiry and the report of the Indonesian Study Club were widely reported in the European and Indonesian press. While the conclusions of the two reports reflected their different starting points, in their detailed reporting they reinforced each other. Given the polarized political atmosphere in the colony, with employers and government seeing any worker protest as

communist-inspired, suggestions for improved labour relations by attention to workers' social and economic conditions fell on deaf ears.

EMPLOYERS, GOVERNMENT AND UNIONS

THE defeat of the Semarang and Surabaya strikes heralded an uncompromising approach by government and employers. From late November 1925 the PKI, the Sarekat Rakjat and all affiliated organizations were banned from holding public meetings. The fingerprinting bureaus in the major cities did increased business as employers determined to root out troublemakers and ensure that they were blacklisted. After the strikes, Surabaya engineering companies had their own 'red lists', used the fingerprinting service of the sugar industry and distributed lists of dismissed workers to sugar factories in an effort to prevent them getting work elsewhere.[120] In the last few months of 1925 reports became more frequent of local union leaders questioned by police and employers and threatened with dismissal if they continued their activities. The location of labour union offices in the same building as PKI branches made it easier for the police to seize records and literature. Denied the right to organize public meetings and denuded of archives and subscription lists, unions were increasingly unable to sustain even the barest supervision of branches and members.

The raids on labour union offices were complemented by harassment of ordinary workers who were still brave enough to remain union members. After the failure of the Surabaya strikes, police and employers went onto the offensive. In the early months of 1926 reports multiplied of workers being dismissed because of their union membership. On 1 January, for example, eleven male nurses and student nurses at the Surabaya Central Municipal Hospital were sacked for spreading communist propaganda. The hospital had attached a notice to the personal lockers of employees stating that they were prohibited from participating in any communist activity or from bringing any papers of a communist nature into the hospital. Spot checks of the contents of the lockers and close surveillance of suspected workers enforced the bans.[121] On 4 January, several policemen went to the Batavia Gas Factory and questioned all workers as to whether they were members of the SBBE. One man refused to answer the questions and was later

dismissed.[122] In Semarang, harbour employers began taking a hard line against any worker who was a member of the SPPL, made easier because the police made available seized membership lists. During January 1926 it was reported that many SPPL members called at the SPPL offices seeking letters stating that they were not members of the union, so that they could convince employers that they had resigned their membership.[123] Early in February, KPM at Semarang dismissed two foremen, a sailor and a helmsman because they were still SPPL members.[124] A Surabaya company went one step further early in March by summoning all its workers and asking if they were members of the SPPL or the PKI — then giving wage rises on the condition that they did not join these organizations.[125]

The VSTP was an early casualty of the government's more uncompromising approach to labour unions. It had scheduled its congress for Solo on 25 and 26 December 1925, but this was cancelled at the last minute when on 24 December the government prohibited it from holding public meetings anywhere in Java, Sumatra and the Celebes. Sugono, the VSTP chairman, was angry that the VSTP had incurred considerable costs in getting more than eighty delegates to Solo, after an assurance from the Assistant Chief Commissioner of police that the congress could go ahead. Arbitrary treatment such as this, Sugono warned, must force VSTP members to reconsider their tactics:

> The peaceful road which has come to an end has run into the prohibitive laws and regulations mentioned above, which have damaged the VSTP. If this road is closed and can no longer be effective — well — brothers — it is your responsibility to protect your labour union with all your power and for VSTP leaders there is only one slogan which must be held in high esteem and adhered to firmly. This slogan is: death or victory.[126]

The railway and tramway companies continued their policy of dismissing workers caught spreading communist propaganda at work. According to *Si Tetap*, early in 1926 one railway worker was dismissed for spreading VSTP propaganda, another for collecting union dues, a third for being a branch activist and a fourth when police searching his house found VSTP membership and contribution cards. Some of the smaller companies in east Java, such as the Kediri Steamtram Company, forbade membership of the VSTP entirely.[127] Within the much larger Sister Societies some individual

managers wanted to dismiss workers who were PKI members. The Chief Representative, G. Diephuis, was more sensitive to the damage such a policy might do to labour relations. While acknowledging that the VSTP was run by revolutionaries, nevertheless he argued that they were also involved in quite legitimate trade union activities:

I can therefore conclude that as conditions are at present, of the many people who call themselves communists, for the most part only those leaders and propagandists who come from outside the industry are actually extremists. The great mass of them, and among these the greater part of the railway workers who sit on local executives, are trade union people who do not identify with the revolutionary character of communism.[128]

Individual companies and the State Railways continued their close surveillance of VSTP activities and, in cooperation with local police and Residents, warned individuals to weigh their union activity against their jobs. The constant police searches of union offices and surveillance of mail persuaded the Cirebon executive to urge that letters and money be sent by trusted people on trains and trams in order to avoid interception:

Brothers, we hereby inform you that acting on a report received yesterday from the central executive of the VSTP, you should not continue your correspondence for the time being, for letters will certainly be intercepted along the way. From now on, brothers, you must adopt the following arrangements. All letters, reports and payments should be sent via the Cirebon SS branch and must be received by us by the 10th; from Cirebon SS we will send a trusted person to Semarang on the 11th to take over letters and money not only from here but from other places as well.
If there are urgent letters, then these should also be sent to the Cirebon SS, in a double envelope, the inner one with the address of the central executive on it and the outer one with the address, Radiman, Cirebon SS; we are able to send a messenger to Semarang each day.
If there are members who have still not received a contribution card and a membership card, then we hope that contributions will first be receipted by the branch executive, because the entire archive of the central executive has been seized making these cards difficult to obtain.
We will do the rest in the normal way; when the messenger returns from Semarang, he will bring reports as to how our brothers should carry on their activities. For the moment, it is necessary to ensure that letters and money not be seized along the way. From now on, our brothers must

work systematically and energetically and must strive for the important things; what they do not understand, they are able to ask about from the larger branches which can give them the information. Confirm these instructions to all executive members and then tear up this letter; the executive brothers will have to trust each other. Concerning the despatches, we will send you our receipts and add 'on behalf of' the central executive. Pay attention to the above instructions.[129]

The bans against communist-led unions, including the VSTP, holding public meetings continued. This did not stop small meetings being held, but the police spy network was effective, and when they were discovered, those in attendance were arrested and hauled before local courts. The Surabaya harbour police, for example, arrested nine railway workers on 7 March 1926 for holding a VSTP meeting in a shed on the State Railways embankment in the harbour. All were subsequently fined between f10 and f15 each.[130]

The possibility of taking even stronger action against railway workers who were PKI members was canvassed by the heads of the private railway networks in March 1926. In the face of pressure from the heads of the smaller companies, Diephuis and Cool, from the Sister Societies and the NIS respectively, successfully argued for a more moderate approach. To those who advocated the dismissal of all employees who were PKI members, Cool simply stated that his company would then no longer be able to operate. Diephuis argued that he did not want further to reduce trust between his company and its employees by widespread dismissals:

There is still one question to be answered. How does the native see communism? Communist leaders put themselves forward as leaders of the labour movement and if we dismiss them then in the eyes of workers we injure not communism but the labour movement.[131]

The State Railways was under greater pressure from local Residents, who urged that membership of the VSTP be banned. Reports were made detailing the links between the VSTP and the PKI — links, of course, which neither organization had ever denied. The Director of Government Industries suggested in March that at least membership of VSTP executives be banned.[132] The Government Secretary replied that it would be better if the State Railways management gently pressured the more moderate

elements in the VSTP to see the dangers of extremist leaders in the union.[133] The issue was revived at the beginning of April, when the Attorney-General argued that the time had come for a complete ban on government employees being members of the PKI or the VSTP. In his view:

> . . . the VSTP, however much its original aim was to be a labour union, now tries to sustain that image for the sake of appearances only. In reality, its leading members, under the influence of the communist leadership, have fallen so far into the wake of the PKI that the VSTP should be considered as a sub-section of the party, at least so closely connected to it that it supports the subversive struggle of the party. Therefore, from the standpoint of the government, it is as dangerous, if not more dangerous, as the party itself.[134]

He suggested that the government make a final effort to push the VSTP into the direction of pure trade union activities. The government should state that all non-trade unionists must be removed from VSTP executives and also that no government employee could be a member of either the PKI or the Sarekat Rakjat. His assumption was that, by purifying the executives of communists, new loyal executives would emerge from the bosom of the organization itself.[135]

At the end of May the government finally banned its employees from being members of the PKI or the Sarekat Rakjat. Membership of labour unions was not prohibited, though, with the bans on public meetings imposed in December 1925 still in place, other than minimum union activity was impossible. The VSTP, still the largest of the unions, claimed a membership of 8,000 in April 1926, but with records confiscated, leaders jailed and meetings banned, few of these 8,000 were more than nominal members.[136] Money was still collected by local activists, but as government and employer pressure was sustained, local morale collapsed and the flow of funds to Semarang slowed to a trickle.

Other unions found it just as difficult to recruit members. The Union of Sugar Factory Employees, PFB, had collapsed in 1923; the only branches with any life at all were in some of the major towns in central and east Java. Branches at Madiun, Semarang and Pekalongan were still operative, but activity at the factory level was minimal and the payment of membership dues even worse.[137] The collapse of artisan interest in labour unions was paralleled by

an almost complete absence of strikes after the 1919–21 epidemic. In 1922 the Java Sugar Employers Association reported only seven strikes in its members' factories and in 1923 recorded only two.[138]

With the collapse of the PFB, communist organizers tried to establish an alternative union for sugar factory workers. The *Perhimpunan Untuk Kaum Buruh Onderneming Gula* was established late in 1924 and efforts were made to recruit sugar factory foremen and skilled workers. At the beginning of 1925 the name of the union was simplified to *Sarekat Buruh Gula*. Its chairman was the 23 year-old Aliarcham, chairman of the PKI from mid-1924 until his internment in December 1926, with most of its local leadership coming from Sarekat Rakjat activists. The union had little influence on sugar factory workers, although in December 1925 the Java Sugar Employers Association reported, in its usual alarmist manner, that some thirty-five sugar factories had been subject to communist activity since September 1925.[139] Article 8b of the Penal Code was applied to the SBG throughout Java on 30 December 1925 and henceforth all public meetings were prohibited. In the same month the Java Sugar Employers Association decided that its members would dismiss any worker 'who through word, deed or writing, in or outside the workplace, makes propaganda for communist principles or for the membership of a communist organization'.[140] Throughout 1926 sugar factories dismissed dozens of workers accused of spreading propaganda for the PKI, Sarekat Rakjat or the SBG.[141] Some were also dealt with by local courts. One sugar factory in Pasuruan Residency in March 1926 discovered that forty-one of its artisans had attended a Sarekat Rakjat meeting in the factory compound. The matter was referred to the local magistrate who sentenced the men to between fourteen and forty days' jail each.[142]

CONCLUSION

SINCE December 1925 the organization of urban workers had become impossible. A brave front was maintained by communist-led unions such as the VSTP, the Sarekat Postel and the SBG, but their organizations were shattered, many of their leaders were in jail and local activists had either lost their jobs or were in such fear of doing so that they abandoned union activity. Spontaneous strikes still occurred — including in the harbours, the printing

industry and among Singer Sewing Machine workers — but they were few and far between.

Unions led by men other than PKI members were also in considerable disarray, reflecting the decline of Sarekat Islam since 1921 and the absence of alternative nationalist parties. The pawnshop workers union never recovered from the defeat of its 1922 strike and the PFB had disappeared entirely. All that remained were the teachers' unions — three in number as assistant teachers and lower level teachers broke away from the PGHB to form their own unions — and the VIPBOW. These salaried government employees remained on the fringe of the nascent labour movement in the early 1920s and stayed aloof from the militancy of urban workers in private employ and in the railways and pawnshops. Their unions remained as they had always been, moderate organizations gently pressuring the colonial government for improved wages and conditions and discussing professional issues.

The first phase of the Indonesian labour movement effectively ended with the defeat of the Surabaya strikes in December 1925. Many of the unions remained in existence until late 1926 but as mere skeletons of their former selves: with little income the paid clerical and propaganda staffs of earlier years quickly disappeared. The PKI itself was on an irreversible collision course with the colonial government. When the rebellion finally broke out in November 1926 it led to the destruction of the PKI and all unions associated with it. The organization of Indonesian workers had to await revival by new organizations under new leadership.

1. *Soeara Ra'jat*, 1 July 1923, in *IPO* 31 (1923), pp. 169-70.
2. Speech at the Palace Conference with the Heads of Regional Governments on Java and Madura on Tuesday 11 March 1924, enclosed in Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 28 July 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15.
3. Official Report, Sugeng, enclosed in Assistant Resident of Jember fo Resident of Besuki, 27 December 1926, V 14 September 1927–14.
4. Resident of Pekalongan to Attorney-General, 16 September 1924 and 27 September 1924, V 5 January 1925-F.
5. *Soeara Boemipoetra*, 1 June 1924, in *IPO* 25 (1924), p. 564.
6. *Si Tetap*, February–March 1926.
7. *Si Tetap*, 31 March 1925.
8. *Si Tetap*, 30 June and 28 February 1925.
9. *Si Tetap*, 30 June 1925.
10. See enclosures in Resident of Pekalongan to Governor-General, 16 March 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.

11. Resident of Pekalongan to Governor-General, 16 March 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.
12. *Api*, 14 April 1925.
13. *Api*, 29 April and 9 May 1925.
14. Central Executive VSTP to Chief Representative Sister Societies, 14 September 1925, Sister Societies Common Archives, 743-III.
15. Chief Representative to Manager East Java Steamtram Company, 28 December 1925, Sister Societies Common Archives, 743-III.
16. Chief Representative Sister Societies to Manager SDS, 26 September 1925, Sister Societies Common Archives, 744-I.
17. Manager Serajudal Steamtram Society to Chief Representative Sister Societies, 10 September 1925, Sister Societies Common Archives, 744-I; Chairman Management Committee NIS to Chairman of Directors, 18 July 1925, NIS Correspondence XXVIII.
18. McVey, op. cit., pp. 167-8.
19. *Soeara Boemipoetra*, 1 June 1924, in *IPO* 25 (1924), pp. 560–2.
20. See, *Sinar Hindia*, in *IPO* 23 (1924), pp. 422ff.
21. *Hindia Baroe*, c.10 June 1924, in *IPO* 25 (1924), p. 533.
22. *Sinar Hindia*, 15 May 1924.
23. *Sinar Hindia*, 29 April 1924.
24. *Sinar Hindia*, 21 May 1924; *Soeara Boemipoetra*, 1 June 1924.
25. *Soeara Boemipoetra*, 1 June 1924.
26. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 12 and 15 July 1924.
27. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 17 July 1924.
28. *Api*, 14, 17, 18 and 20 August 1925.
29. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 29 August 1925.
30. Mansvelt and Creutzberg, op. cit., Vol. 5, National Income.
31. The cost-of-living index is taken from ibid., p. 80. The rice price index is taken from idem., Vol 4, Rice Prices, p. 46.
32. *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 4, 5, and 6 November, 27 December 1924; *Api*, 9 and 17 January 1925.
33. *Java Bode*, 1 and 2 May 1925.
34. *Api*, 17 and 20 April, 4 June 1925.
35. *Soeara PZVB*, March 1925.
36. *Soeara PZVB*, March and May 1925.
37. *Soeara PZVB*, May and June 1925.
38. *Hindia Baroe*, 5 August 1925; *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 30 July 1925.
39. *Hindia Baroe*, 11 August 1925.
40. *Hindia Baroe*, 5 August 1925.
41. *Hindia Baroe*, 5 August 1925; *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 30 July 1925.
42. *Java Bode*, 29 July and 7 August 1925.
43. *Java Bode*, 30 July 1925.
44. *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 25 November 1925.
45. McVey, op. cit., p. 290.
46. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 9 June 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1.
47. *Indische Courant*, 24 July 1925; *Api*, 22 July 1925.
48. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 30 July 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1.
49. *Api*, 8 June 1925.

50. *Locomotief*, 27 July 1925.
51. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 30 July 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1; *Indische Courant*, 24 July 1925.
52. *Locomotief*, 3 August 1925; *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 1 August 1925.
53. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 3 August 1925, V 23 December 1925–M18.
54. See *Api*, 10 August 1925.
55. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 3 August 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1.
56. Ibid; and *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 1 August 1925.
57. *Locomotief*, 3 August 1925.
58. Report by the Regional Detective Service, 4 August 1925, on the Central Municipal Hospital strike at Semarang, enclosed in V 23 December 1925–M18.
59. McVey, op. cit., pp. 215-16.
There are extensive files on the SPLI in: V 27 January 1925–01, V 6 May 1925–H6, V 2 February 1925–U1 and V 26 March 1925–Y3.
60. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., p. 98; *Api*, 24 December 1924.
61. Concept Circular from the Attorney-General to Heads of Local Governments, April 1925, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 7 May 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1.
62. McVey, op. cit., p. 442 n. 78.
Membership of the SPPL cost as little as fifteen cents per month for workers earning f25 or less per month. In the last quarter of 1924 the union received f678.87 and paid out f533.56, mainly in salaries and in the cost of printing *Djangkar*, a monthly broadsheet published from January 1925. See, *Djangkar*, January and February/March 1925, in *IPO* 9 (1925), pp. 442-3 and 20 (1925), pp. 312-14.
63. *Api*, 4 June 1925.
64. *Djangkar*, September 1925, in *IPO* 49 (1925), p. 522.
65. Resident of Pekalongan to Attorney-General, 11 November 1925, Secret Mail Report 1925/1145.
66. *Api*, 28 July 1925.
67. See Regional Detective Service, Semarang, 30 July 1923, V 23 December 1925–M18.
68. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 3 November 1925, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 12 November 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1.
69. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 16 September 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1.
70. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 16 September and 3 November 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1. The replacement sailors were inexperienced at this work and did considerable damage to the *prahu*, forcing the companies to stop work for a week on 24 August in order to repair the damage. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 16 September 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1.
71. *Locomotief*, 26 May 1926. For a more detailed discussion of this strike see Ingleson, 'Life and Work', op. cit.
72. *Api*, 29 August and 6 October 1925.

73. *Api*, 29 August 1925.
74. Resident of Semarang to Governor-General, 3 August 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1; *Api*, 30 July 1925 and 6 October 1925.
75. *Api*, 29 August 1925.
76. *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 3 August 1925.
77. *Java Bode*, 13 August 1925.
78. *Indische Courant*, 16 November 1925.
79. McVey, op. cit., pp. 306-7.
80. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 17 September 1925.
81. VSTP Cirebon Executive to provisional executive Prupuk, 13 August 1925, enclosed in Resident of Pekalongan to Governor-General, 16 March 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.
82. McVey, op. cit., p. 307.
83. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., pp. 99-100.
84. 'Korte verslag nopens . . .', enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 11 January 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15, p. 43.
85. Head of Detective Service, Surabaya, to Assistant Resident of Surabaya, 25 August 1925, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 11 May 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15.
86. 'Surabaya branch, Political Report for the month of July 1925', Appendix J, 'Surabaya branch, Political Report for the Month of June 1925', Appendix I, 'Surabaya branch, Political Report for the month of March 1925', Appendix F, in Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 28 July 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15.
87. Head of Detective Service to Assistant Resident of Surabaya, 28 August 1925, enclosed in Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 28 July 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15.
88. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., p. 77; Head of Detective Service to Assistant Resident of Surabaya, 28 August 1925, enclosed in Resident of Surabaya to Governor-General, 28 July 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15; *Nieuwe Soerabaiaasche Courant*, 10 November 1925.
89. Report of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Surabaya, 7 October 1925, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 11 May 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15.
90. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., p. 78; *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 9 October 1925; *Locomotief*, 6 October 1925 and *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 10 October 1925; *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 14 December 1925.
91. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., pp. 78-9.
92. Biographical details emerged in the trial of Sukindar, Supeno and five other SBBE leaders in Surabaya in October 1926. See, *Soeara*, 27 October and 6 November 1926.
93. Chief Commissioner of Police, Surabaya, to Assistant Resident of Surabaya, 22 September 1925, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 11 May 1926, V 1 October 1926–M15.
94. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 25 November 1925.
95. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., p. 104.

The insensitivity of European managers to the feelings of their Indonesian workers was remarkable. In November 1925, for example, workers in the boilermaking section of the Dry Dock Company had fifteen cents docked

from their wages as a contribution towards a presentation to the retiring manager, who was returning to the Netherlands. There was much grumbling among workers and later they demanded reimbursement, but this was denied. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 18 November 1925.

96. *Locomotief*, 17–21 December 1925 (Mail edition).
97. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 4 November 1925.
98. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 12 December 1925.
99. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., Appendix 4, pp. 133-6; Chairman and Secretary Surabaya branch SBBE to Managers, Engineering Companies in Surabaya, 2 December 1925, Ibid., Appendix S.
100. *Api*, 27 and 30 November 1925.
101. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., Appendix 4, pp. 133-6; Chairman and Secretary Surabaya branch SBBE to Managers, Engineering Companies in Surabaya, 2 December 1925, Ibid., Appendix S.
102. *Api*, 27 and 30 November 1925.
103. Extract from confidential letter from the Chairman of the Java Sugar Employers Association to J. H. van Hassett, 31 December 1925, enclosed in Secretary Beniso to Members, No B1133, 4 February 1926, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6767.
104. *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 17 December 1925.
105. Ibid.
106. *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit., p. 88.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid., p. 36.
109. Ibid., p. 17.
Many of the engineering companies were in poor financial condition and the Resident of Surabaya feared that a long strike could force some of them out of business. The companies urged the Sugar Syndicate to support them by not applying fines to late delivery on contracts because, it argued, it was in the interests of all employers that this strike be defeated. (Resident of Surabaya to Attorney-General, 17 December 1925, enclosed in Attorney-General to Governor-General, 21 December 1925, V 30 January 1926–K1).
110. Ibid., p. 31.
111. Ibid.
112. *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 27 November 1925.
113. *De Courant*, 4 January 1926.
114. *Kemadjoean Hindia*, 28 November and 1 December 1925.
115. See, *Algemeene Indische Dagblad*, 22 October 1926, which reported on the appearance before the Surabaya District Court of the leaders of the Surabaya strikes. One of the defendants, when asked how workers survived during the strike, given that there was no strike fund, replied that they had found work in the sugar factories.
116. See statistics in *Rapport . . . Metaalindustrie te Soerabaia*, op. cit.
171. Ibid., p. 88.
118. For a discussion of the Indonesian Study Club, see J. Ingleson, *Road to Exile: the Indonesian Nationalist Movement, 1927–1934* (Singapore, 1979), Chapter 1.
119. The report was published in *Soeloeh Indonesia*, March 1926. It was reprinted in *Java Bode*, 27 March 1926.
120. *Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad*, 4 May 1926.

121. *Soerabaiasche Handelsblad*, 1 January 1926.
122. *Api*, 12 January 1926.
123. *Api*, 28 January 1926.
124. *Api*, 4 February 1926.
125. *Api*, 3 March 1926.
126. *Si Tetap*, 31 December 1925.
127. *Si Tetap*, February–March 1926.
128. Chief Representative to Head of Exploitation SCS and Administrators OJS and SDS, 9 January 1926, Sister Societies Common Archives, 744-I.
129. Enclosed in Resident of Pekalongan to Governor-General, 16 March 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.
130. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 8 April 1926, V 11 November 1926–V17; *Locomotief*, 10 March 1926.
131. 'Notes of the 24th Meeting of the Executive Commission, held on 23 March 1926 in the NIS Meeting Hall, Semarang', Sister Societies Common Archives, 744-I.
132. Director of Government Industries to Governor-General, 30 March 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.
133. Government Secretary to Directors of Government Industries, 12 April 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.
134. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 6 April 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.
135. Ibid.
136. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 6 April 1926, V 10 November 1926–P17.
137. Java Sugar Employers Association, 'Survey of the Native Movement, No A2991', 15 October 1923, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6763.
138. Extract from Notes of a Members Meeting of the Java Sugar Employers Association, 14 November 1923, enclosed in Secretary Beniso to Members, B 781, 17 December 1923, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6763.
139. Java Sugar Employers Association, 'Survey of the Native Movement, No 27', 12 December 1925, V 11 November 1926–V17.
The government regarded reports from the Java Sugar Employers Association on political and labour union activity as unreliable and alarmist. It was unimpressed with the calibre of the spies and the quality of other sources of information used by the association. See, Attorney-General to Governor-General, 5 May 1926, V 11 November 1926–V17.
140. Java Sugar Employers Association, 'Information for Members No 187', 10 December 1925, Secret Mail Report 1925/1244.
141. Between 21 December 1925 and 18 March 1926 some forty-three workers were dismissed at sixteen mills for communist activity. Secretary Beniso to Members, No B1151, 18 March 1926, BENISO, NHM Archives, Box 6767.
142. Attorney-General to Governor-General, 8 April 1926, V 11 November 1926–V17.

Conclusion

FOR more than a decade tens of thousands of urban Indonesians had joined labour unions. Even larger numbers had gone on strike. But commitment to unionism and the strike tactic lasted only as long as unions successfully supported workers in their conflicts with employers and were able to negotiate better wages. Support was quickly withdrawn as soon as government and employers stepped up anti-union measures and union leaders proved unable to defend their members. Unions had to be continually successful, and seen to be successful, in order to survive. Workers were well able to assess the options open to them and the likely risks involved in their search for justice. When government and employers raised the cost of joining a union or going on strike to the point where jobs were threatened, they felt they had little choice but to seek other ways of redressing their grievances.

Permanent skilled workers provided the local leadership crucial to the worker militancy and the expansion of labour unions. They were the mediators between the intellectual leaders of the labour unions and the mass of workers in factories or workshops and in the railways or the ports. But the reliance on skilled workers and foremen was both a strength and a weakness for the labour unions. These men had considerable powers of patronage in the workplaces. Their informed political and social consciousness, and their realization that they could do something to improve their lot in life, moved them into labour militancy and nationalist agitation. However, while they were keen to improve their wages and conditions, and those of the less skilled workers around them, they were at the same time very conscious of their skills, their literacy, their importance to the colonial economy and above all of the differences between themselves and the mass of urban workers.

The PKI newspaper *Sinar Hindia* saw the problem clearly in 1921 when it complained about the lack of unity among workers in the United Java Timber Company:

> Most of those who receive high salaries, the educated people, are treated sympathetically by their bosses, so that they do not participate in all sorts of actions. This is a sickness, an obstacle for labour activity.[1]

Teachers and pawnshop workers had quickly established separate unions divided by rank and salary, but even the nurses who had gone on strike in Semarang in 1925 had shown little solidarity with the ordinary people who were the bulk of their patients.

Many central leaders had tried to break down this sense of social exclusiveness among the skilled and the literate. At branch meetings and annual congresses as well as in union newspapers they had constantly urged worker solidarity. They made little headway against the deep social divisions within Javanese society. The workplaces were divided by rank, status, ethnicity and region with employers exploiting these divisions to their advantage. The organization of workers took place along similar lines. Not only did few Chinese workers join labour unions but unions dominated at the local level by people from one ethnic group or region found great difficulty in recruiting workers from different ethnic groups or regions.

The intellectuals who led the labour unions were well aware of the difficulties they faced in trying to create a strong labour movement. Some unions for government workers, such as teachers or municipal employees, were able to develop strong and enduring structures. The colonial government tolerated these moderate unions because they posed little immediate threat, politically or industrially, though it perhaps under-estimated their long-term importance for the development of Indonesian nationalism. Militant unions were a different matter. Union leaders had no answer to the increasingly repressive measures of the government. Consistent pressure from the colonial government added to the difficulties they faced in converting the workers' sense of injustice into union commitment. Very few unions succeeded in persuading workers to part with membership fees regularly. Starved of a reliable income, unions were unable to employ the field workers and the central staff needed to create strong structures in the workplaces.

The colonial government laid the blame for urban unrest in the immediate post-war years on the communists. If the communists had not agitated among urban workers, it argued, strikes would not have occurred on the scale that they did and there would have been no need for a crackdown on labour unions. Certainly, the leadership of many of the more militant unions was in the hands of PKI members, their propaganda did arouse the expectations of urban workers, and local leaders did not shy away from confrontation with employers. After 1926, with the PKI crushed and thousands of its leaders jailed, others took control of the labour unions and in the prevailing political climate were forced to steer them into a less confrontationist direction. However, in blaming the communists for the urban unrest between 1918 and 1926 the colonial government ignored the social and economic forces that moved workers to strike. In a close analysis of the strikes in these years it has been argued that in almost all cases the initiative came from workers themselves. Large numbers of urban workers were seeking greater justice in the workplaces and were therefore receptive to the arguments of those who advocated direct action. Furthermore, leadership of the sugar factory workers union (PFB) and the pawnshop workers union (PPPB) was in non-communist hands, but this did not prevent them being involved in direct confrontations with employers and government.

Union leaders frequently talked about revolution and it was this rhetoric that so often frightened the European community. But in practice all drew back from mass action, in part because they feared that once launched they would not be able to control it. Perhaps too, with few exceptions, they were conscious that they did not truly understand the motivations of urban workers. The central leaders of major unions, men such as Semaun and Surjopranoto, were, in C. Wright Mills' term for union leaders in Western societies, 'managers of discontent'. In their view, worker discontent arising from a strong sense of injustice had to be controlled and channelled if labour unions were to make long-term gains and avoid government repression. To this end they tried to avoid confrontation with employers and government as much as possible. They were well aware of the tenuousness of their control over workers; so often their hands were forced by workers taking their own action and then demanding union support.

The immediate gains of urban workers in Java in these years

were only modest. In industries affected by strikes there were improvements in wages which compensated to some extent for inflation. These gains flowed through to many other urban workers, although most received too little too late. Worker militancy did, however, force managers and government to pay greater attention to the grievances of urban workers; individual injustices were reversed, and collective grievances resolved. True, managements and government eventually cooperated to crush the nascent labour movement, but they were permanently shaken out of their complacency. Many of the improved conditions gained in these years were retained, with managers more aware of the need to keep them under review. The establishment of a Labour Office, with its preparation of extensive reports on major industries, placed additional pressure on managements. In a colonial society as repressive as the Netherlands Indies in the 1920s, little more could be expected.

It is not surprising that worker militancy in Java in the 1910s and 1920s achieved only modest success. Although labour unions made some gains in nineteenth century Britain, the major improvements in workers' wages and living conditions came in the twentieth century, after electoral reforms gave all workers a vote and after the establishment of a Labour Party closely linked to the union movement. The pattern was similar in other capitalist societies: significant improvements in the lot of workers was achieved only after there was some measure of freedom of political organization. This was also true in colonies such as India, where in the last forty years of British rule there was far greater freedom of political association than in Indonesia. As a result, nationalist parties, especially the Indian National Congress, and labour unions could create organizational structures with some continuity of leadership. Despite all the restrictions and harassments of the British Raj, political parties (including the communist party) and labour unions operated in a colonial environment which allowed some scope for urban intellectuals and political leaders to develop strong linkages with rural areas and the urban poor as well as with factories and workplaces.

In colonial Indonesia, the limits of legal activity were much narrower for both nationalist parties and labour unions. Under the influence of the so-called Ethical Policy there was a brief period when political and union growth was allowed to occur reasonably freely, albeit under watchful official eyes. This relatively liberal approach ended in 1921. The last twenty years of Dutch rule were

marked by repressive policies against all nationalist parties and all labour unions, irrespective of ideology or tactics. Neither activity was ever declared illegal as such but restrictive colonial laws prevented urban leaders creating durable linkages with the kampungs or the rural areas. In a society where there was an oversupply of urban labour, maintained by a constant influx from the rural areas, where strike breaking was encouraged by the colonial rulers and where the instruments of government repression were firmly on the side of management, the strike weapon became a blunt instrument.

In Western societies during the first stages of industrialization, as well as in many colonial societies, worker discontent and sense of injustice was frequently manifested in urban riots or sporadic violence directed against factories, workshops and other property identified with capitalist exploitation. In colonial Java there was no urban rioting or violence, apart from occasional anti-Chinese actions. It may be argued that Indonesians were inherently, for cultural reasons, less prone to violence than Indians, Vietnamese, Peruvians or Britons, but the urban rioting and violence that occurred after Independence makes such an argument difficult to sustain. Nor can it be argued that Indonesian urban workers were satisfied with their lot, though it might be argued that urban living conditions in the colonial cities were yet to reach the crisis point where resort to violence was seen as the only possible response. The outbreak of urban violence after Independence may, in part, have reflected the accompanying instability in living conditions for the urban majority in Java. More importantly, it probably reflected the lower level of social control exercised by successive Indonesian governments in the first two decades of Independence and the greater freedom for political parties and labour unions.

The crucial factor in the absence of urban violence in colonial Java was the power of the colonial state and its willingness to use that power. The social control exerted by the Dutch in Java seems to have been more complete than that of colonial powers elsewhere. Java was a small, closely settled island, where by the beginning of the twentieth century the Dutch colonial impact had penetrated deep into the fabric of urban and rural society. There was an effective colonial administration supported by an extensive political intelligence service which ensured that surveillance of political and union leaders was well-nigh complete. The administration enforced its rule through a well-organized police force,

with strategically located armed police units able to be summoned quickly to any trouble-spots, backed up by army units dispersed throughout the island. This was complemented in the workplaces and factories by tight labour discipline imposed by employers with the support of administrators and police.

The legal framework for labour union activity had changed greatly since the heady post-war days, as had employer and government tolerance of worker protest. The PKI's resort to rebellion destroyed the party and ended the first phase of the Indonesian labour movement, during which members of the communist party had dominated the organization of unions. Worker militancy was crushed for the moment, but the impact of the successes as well as the failures of these early years lived on in the memories of individuals and communities. The struggle for fair wages and improved living and working conditions emerged from workers' own perceptions of the injustice of their situation. The destruction of labour unions in the 1920s, the tightening of the laws on assembly and dissent, together with repressive press legislation, brought to an end the first major effort by workers to redress their grievances.

Worker militancy and unionization was an essential part of the growth of nationalism in Indonesia. The economic and social changes taking place in urban Java from the late nineteenth century affected workers' experiences in the workplaces and shaped their views of colonialism. Workers' unease in the face of these social and economic changes and their sense of injustice at the impact on their lives of poor wages, bad conditions or employer arbitrariness made them receptive to the nationalist propaganda of the urban intellectuals. In the wake of the colonial government's destruction of the PKI, and of unions connected to it, new nationalist parties and labour unions emerged to continue the struggle. Labour unions were forced to adopt different strategies and tactics but they continued to resolve workers' individual and collective grievances. The nationalist movement which flourished after 1927 was the public manifestation of anti-colonialism in Java. Its growth owed much to the changes that had taken place in urban workers' perceptions of the world and their continued search for greater justice in the workplaces.

1. *Sinar Hindia*, 17 August 1921, in *IPO* 34 (1921), p. 379.

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Dr John Ingleson is at present lecturer in history at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

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